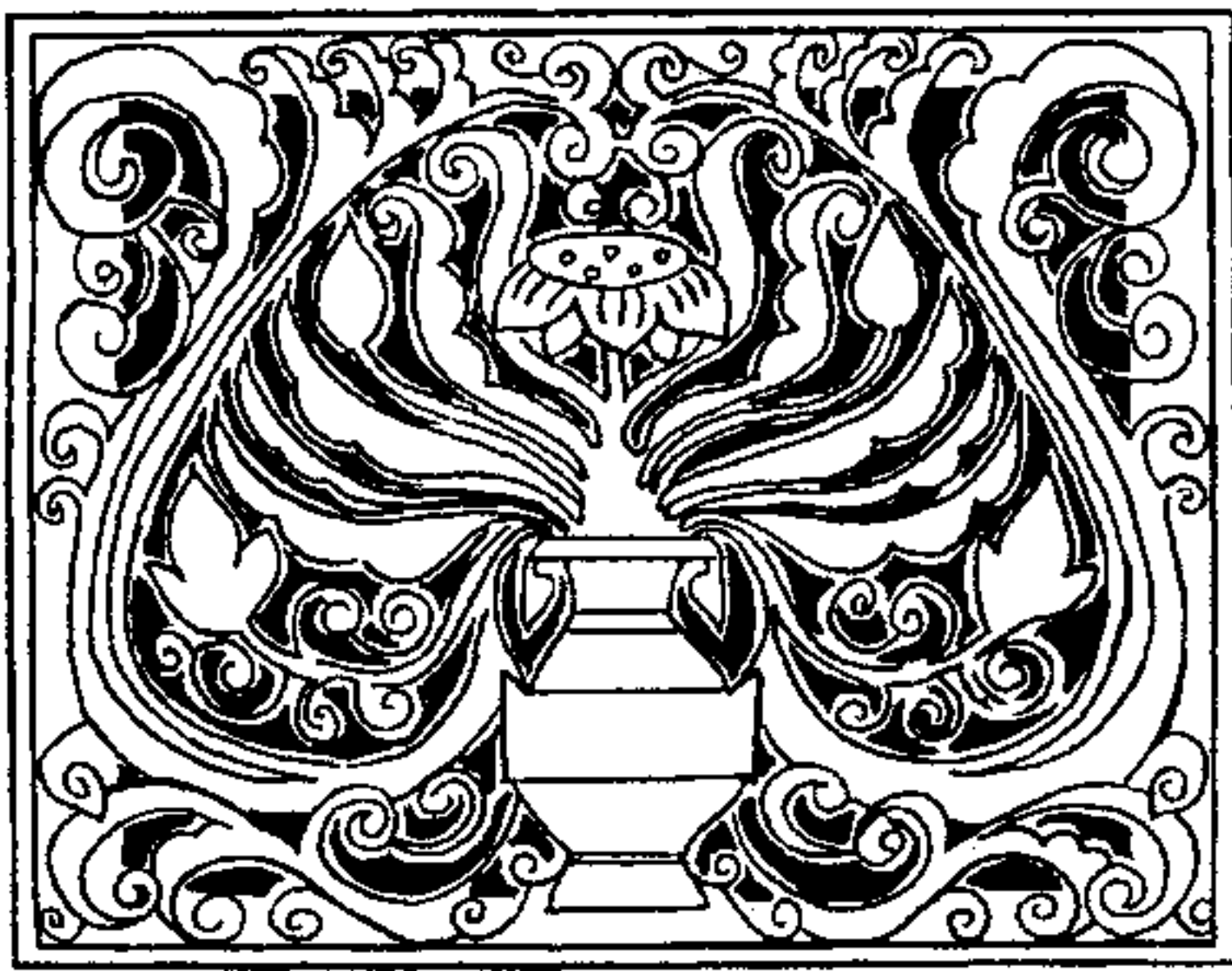




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Cover: A Panoramic view of Advaita
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SEPTEMBER 1999

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उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 104

SEPTEMBER 1999

No. 9

VEDIC PRAYERS

इन्द्रं मित्रं वरुणमग्निमृतये
मारुतं शर्धो अदितिं हवामहे।
रथं न दुर्गाद्विसवः सुदानवो
विश्वस्मान्नो अंहसो निष्पिपर्तन॥
—Rg Veda, 1.106.1

We earnestly pray to Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, the Maruts and Aditi (ie to all gods and goddesses) for protection. Just as able charioteers steer their chariots through dangerous paths to safety, may these benefactors and providers of shelter destroy all our sins and protect us.

त आदित्या आ गता सर्वतातये
भूत देवा वृत्रतूर्येषु शंभुवः।
रथं न दुर्गाद्विसवः सुदानवो
विश्वस्मान्नो अंहसो निष्पिपर्तन॥
—Rg Veda, 1.106.2

O Ādityas (ie gods)! Please come to our aid in war. Please come and help us win the war. Even as able charioteers steer their chariots through dangerous paths to safety, may you benefactors and providers of shelter destroy all our sins and protect us.

स नो दूराच्चासाच्च
नि मर्त्यादिघायोः।
पाहि सदमिद्विश्वायुः॥
—Rg Veda, 1.27.3

O all-pervading Agni! Please protect us from people of countries both far and near, who intend to harm us.

The Magic Touch

EDITORIAL

Mahābali laughed aloud. 'Do you really want only that much?' he asked the tiny-looking dwarf before him. 'Yes, O Bali,' replied the brahmin, 'I want only this much. I shall measure three steps of land, and please grant me that much.'

It was the great sacrifice of Mahābali. Drunk with the wine of victory over the gods, proud at the way all the worlds were at his feet, Bali had decided upon that great sacrifice. It was customary that holy brahmins were worshipped for the success of the sacrifice. One such brahmin, Vāmana, had presented himself with a peculiar wish.

Aditi had wept bitter tears. Her children, the gods, had no place to live owing to Mahābali's atrocities. Viṣṇu heard her prayers and promised her, 'Fear not! I shall come to save you.' He had condescended as Vāmana and had gone to Bali as a brahmin.

'Measure your three feet's worth of land then,' ordered Bali. Suddenly, Vāmana became a giant. His head touched the sky, as it were. With his first step, the earth got measured up. The sky was covered with his second. 'Now,' thundered Vāmana, 'where am I to place my third step?' Stunned at the developments, Mahābali promptly showed his head. Vāmana placed his foot on Bali's head and pushed him into the nether worlds. Aditi rejoiced, the gods rejoiced, and peace was restored in the universe.

Thousands of stories and anecdotes are told about the glory of God's lotus feet. On a single night, Vedānta Deśika composed the *Pādukā Sahasra*, a thousand verses in praise of the Lord's feet. In the *Saundarya Lahari*,

Śaṅkara sings about the Divine Mother: 'Collecting a few particles of dust of your lotus feet, O Mother, Brahmā created this universe and Viṣṇu is ever alert to protect it.' Again, in the *Śivānanda Lahari* Śaṅkara addresses Lord Śiva: 'O my Lord! Thousands of gods are there in the world, who grant puerile benefits. Even in my dreams I do not think of following them or seeking the benefits they grant. What I have been asking for is the worship of Thy lotus feet which is not easy even for Brahmā and Viṣṇu who are near you.'

The Touch of Rāma's Feet

The boatman anchored his beautiful boat. He looked up. On the sands of the Gaṅgā stood the shining ones: Śrī Rāma, Mother Sitā and Lakṣmaṇa. Rāma told the boatman in a sweet and gentle voice, so full of compassion: 'Please take us over to the other shore.' The boatman was thrilled. His voice became choked with emotion while fighting back tears of joy. He understood that his daily prayers had been heard; for, was it not the same prayer that he repeated every day? He had ferried across several sages. They had taught him how to live and how to pray. They had also prophesied that one day God Himself, as Rāma, along with Sitā and Lakṣmaṇa, would cross the river by his boat. Since he heard the prophecy, how eager had the boatman been! How dextrously had he worked to keep his boat clean, with the softest grass available as seats for the holy three! How fervently had he prayed to the Lord! And today....

'Dear boatman, did you hear me?' The sweet, appealing voice of Rāma woke up the boatman from reverie. Tears rolling down his cheeks, he somehow managed to say, 'O my

God! Yes...I shall take you over.... But....' Rāma nodded at Sitā smilingly. 'O boatman, what could be your doubt?' 'My Lord,' replied the weeping boatman, 'sages tell me that your feet have some magical power. What if my boat became a woman by the touch of your lotus feet.... So, please permit me to wash your feet before your entering my boat.' Sitā and Rāma smiled; they had understood the boatman's heart. The boatman brought a pitcher of Gaṅgā water and while his eyes themselves became tears, as it were, drenching the ground, he slowly washed the feet of Rāma with great devotion. He prostrated repeatedly at Rāma and Sitā's feet. Rāma lifted the weeping boatman and embraced him. After that they crossed the river. The ever alert Sitā offered an ornament to the boatman as fare. 'O gracious Mother, what payment do I need anymore? By the sight of you all, by my touching and washing Rāma's feet, by the great fortune of touching the Lord's body, all my sins of a million births have evaporated. I am liberated in life. I am in supreme bliss.'

What the boatman reminded Rāma was the Ahalyā incident. Cursed by her sage-husband Gautama for no fault of hers, Ahalyā had turned into a stone. The sage had also said that some day, when Rāma's feet would touch her, she would become a woman again. As Rāma walked with his brother Lakṣmaṇa and guru Viśvāmitra one day, his feet accidentally touched a stone, and Gautama's wife had become flesh and blood again, to be united with her husband.

In order to keep his father's promise, Rāma had given up his claim to the throne of Ayodhyā and had gone to the forest. His beloved and devout brother, Bharata, came there and with tears in his eyes, prayed to Rāma to return home. That could not be: the personification of dharma that he was, Rāma would not break his father's promise. Seeing no way of asking Rāma to rule Ayodhyā, Bharata brought out a fresh pair of sandals

and made Rāma wear them. Those sandals, having touched Rāma's feet, became so powerful that Bharata installed them on the throne. For the next 14 long years, they ruled Ayodhyā.

The Touch of Kṛṣṇa's Feet

Kaṁsa was ever after Baby Kṛṣṇa's life. The baby was asleep one day. Kaṁsa's faithful demon, Śakaṭa, came in the guise of a cart. The cart was about to run over the sleeping Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa awoke and used his tiny feet: he kicked the cart. And the cart was broken into pieces, destroying the demon in the process.

It was a few years later. Kṛṣṇa was a young boy then. He used to play with cowherd boys in the forest. One day, the cowherd boys went further on into the forest and there got exhausted. They saw a river, and drank water from it. Instantly the boys fell dead. Kṛṣṇa saw all this. Now, that was the river Kālindī, the home of a dreaded serpent called Kāliya. This serpent, with a thousand hoods, was so poisonous that not only the river but the trees, shrubs and the very air around were polluted.

Kṛṣṇa wanted to punish the evil snake. He jumped into the river. Kāliya came rushing to kill Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa stepped upon the thousand-headed personification of venom and the soft feet of the Lord began dancing there. As Kṛṣṇa danced, the serpent vomited blood and drooped down. Its pride was humbled and it said, 'O Lord, your feet have punished me sufficiently. Be merciful. I shall live a pious life hereafter and shall go elsewhere too. The merciful Kṛṣṇa instantly pardoned the snake and it left the area in a hurry. Kṛṣṇa also restored the cowherds' lives.

When Kṛṣṇa entered the assembly, the Kaurava king Duryodhana did not show him the least respect. He never cared. Kṛṣṇa had come as an ambassador of the Pāṇḍavas. At least a minimal show of respect was expected

of the Kaurava. Duryodhana, however, sat in all arrogance, never even caring to look at Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa smiled and used his feet: he pressed his toe a little. The earth shook, and down came Duryodhana, tumbling from his seat and falling flat at Kṛṣṇa's feet.

The Touch of the Buddha's Feet

'I shall go alone to meet him,' he said calmly. 'But you will be confronting an incarnation of evil! He is a devil. And I hear that he is after his hundredth victim....' 'Never mind,' said the Buddha, 'I have heard everything.... I shall go.' The Buddha walked into the lonely forest. He walked a long while when there was some sound. Aṅgulimāla had spotted his victim and rushed to kill the Buddha. Surprisingly enough, the more he ran, the farther he was from the Buddha. 'Stop! Or else I shall kill you,' Aṅgulimāla shouted. The Buddha smiled as he stopped. He turned to Aṅgulimāla and said, 'Give up your wickedness, my friend. This is not the way to happiness.' Suddenly something happened and the killer was at the Buddha's feet, weeping aloud. The Buddha consoled Aṅgulimāla, 'Fear not! There is a way. All is not lost. Surrender to the Dharma and the Sangha.' The bandit was instantly transformed into a *bhikṣu*.

'Run away! Run away!' People struggled to save their lives. A mad elephant was on the way. Everyone ran but one. The Buddha calmly continued walking towards the elephant. Meanwhile, a hapless mother with her child, unable to run, fell between the elephant and the Buddha. The Buddha said something which the elephant seemed to understand. It stopped. The woman ran to safety. As people around looked on in terror, the Buddha approached the elephant. Slowly, the elephant drew near. While everyone expected the Buddha to be lifted and thrown, the elephant touched the Lord's feet. Tears were seen in its eyes. The Buddha patted it and the so-called mad elephant became a legend.

The Touch of Christ's Feet

A piteous wail! It was from behind him. The Lord turned and saw. It was a woman, weeping bitter tears. In her hand was an alabaster box. Lord Jesus understood everything instantly.

Simon, the Pharisee, had invited Jesus to eat with him. All arrangements had been made and the Lord had begun eating when he heard the painful cries of the woman. She was supposed to be a sinner from the town. This poor woman, full of remorse for her sinful life, was searching for someone to save her. Who else could save her but he who sat there with Simon? In her box, the woman had brought ointment to anoint the Lord's feet. Scared, she stood behind. The compassionate Christ allowed her to do what she wished. The woman washed the Lord's feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. She gently anointed his feet too. The arrogant Pharisee thought: 'Had I been the prophet, I would choose proper people to touch me. I would not allow a sinner or a vagabond to come near and ruin me.' Reading his thoughts, the compassionate Lord said softly, 'Simon, if some one excuses a person who owes him 50 pence and another who owes him 500 pence, because both are unable to repay him, who is benefited most?' 'Why,' said Simon, 'it is the one who vowed the 500 pence.' He had understood. The Lord said that the woman had become pure now, 'for she loved much.' The Lord turned to her and said, 'Thy sins are forgiven.'

Bethany. Lazarus was dead. Martha fell at the Lord's feet and wept sadly. She ran to inform Mary too, who sat firmly, overcome by sorrow. Mary came and held the Christ's feet: 'If only you were here, Lazarus wouldn't have died,' she wept. Seeing the sisters weeping Jesus himself wept. And he assured them, 'Don't worry. Lazarus shall rise.' The poor ladies said, 'It is already four days now, and we have already laid him.' But Jesus would

not hear. He wanted to know where Lazarus lay. It was a cave covered with a stone. Jesus said, 'Move the stone away.' Even the sisters were suspicious about the fate of Lazarus' body. 'It must be stinking by now,' they said. However, when the stone was removed from the mouth of the cave, Jesus called aloud, 'O Lazarus! Come out!' Instantly, tied with post-mortem clothes, Lazarus walked out alive.

The Touch of Caitanya's Feet

The *kīrtan* was at its peak then. Devotees sang in joy and danced in unison. Nitāi was leading the procession. At a distance, there appeared the two infamous drunkards Jagāi and Madhāi, who had achieved not a little notoriety. Drunk to the brim, they walked with unsteady steps and hurled endless insults at Nitāi. Their vulgar insults fell on deaf ears, and Nitāi continued to sing. Ignored thus, the drunkards became enraged and one of them lifted his empty arrack pot and hit Nitāi on the head. The *kīrtan* stopped. All were stunned. Someone ran to inform Caitanya who was nearby. Blood poured out of the wound, but all the same, Nitāi sang and invited the drunkards too to sing. Seeing blood, the fools came to their senses and fell at Nitāi's feet, seeking pardon. He, however, had never been angry to pardon them. But Caitanya was. For the first time, people saw his anger. The drunkards ran to Caitanya and fell at his feet. He was unmoved. But when Nitāi himself sought the Lord's pardon, Caitanya melted seeing Nitāi's compassion. He excused the wrongdoers. The touch of the Lord's feet had its effect: since that day, Jagāi and Madhāi became saints, singing the Lord's praises day and night.

Vāsudeva Sārvabhauma was a reputed scholar of Advaita Vedanta who never compromised with any other path. Caitanya was his student. The scholarship which Sārvabhauma displayed in proving Advaitic statements and condemning the *bhakti* path pained Caitanya. But he was silent. The

teacher asked him one day, 'Why are you always silent? Don't you understand what I say?' Caitanya replied that he no doubt understood him but could not understand why he decried *bhakti*. A debate ensued. The renowned pundit was nowhere near Caitanya in argument too. When he ran out of points, Sārvabhauma understood the truth. He surrendered to Caitanya and fell at his feet. It is needless to add that since that day, Sārvabhauma became an ardent devotee.

The Touch of Sri Ramakrishna's Feet

Rakhal was adamant. He wanted some supernatural experience. That day, while massaging Sri Ramakrishna's feet, he went on requesting Ramakrishna for some supernatural experience. Ramakrishna was unmoved. When the boy went on, the latter scolded him. Hurt, Rakhal got angry and walked away. But how far could he go? His feet could not move out of the gate at all. He sat down helplessly. Ramakrishna sent his nephew Ramlal to fetch him back. 'You were angry with me. Do you know why I made you angry? There was a purpose in it. Medicine acts only after the sore has been opened.' The boy was not yet ready to withstand the force of the vision Ramakrishna would grant. A few days later, when Rakhal was again massaging Sri Ramakrishna's feet, he suddenly lost all external consciousness. He was blessed with the transcendental vision he panted for, and the bliss he experienced was known to him alone.

It was the period of his last illness when Sri Ramakrishna was at the Cossipore garden house. A well-known ruffian youth of the locality, Manmatha by name, came to see him all of a sudden one day. The rules were strict in those days: no one would be allowed near Sri Ramakrishna at odd hours, as he was terminally ill. Arguments were useless. The ruffian *wanted* to meet him. When Sri Ramakrishna was told about this, he asked Manmatha to be allowed inside. Manmatha came and saluted Ramakrishna by touching his

feet. Sri Ramakrishna gave him one of his photographs. What happened no one can say. The young man ran out of the house like one mad. From that moment on, he lost all consciousness of the outer world and went on repeating day and night, 'My beloved Lord! My beloved Lord!' He shed tears of joy. He never returned to Sri Ramakrishna. But the transformation of the personality with the touch of Ramakrishna's feet was tremendous.

The Touch of Human Feet

We saw samples of the glory of God's feet. Human feet are no less. Like in the case of Vāmana, they have covered the earth, negotiated the heights of the Everest and depths of the sea. Human feet have walked on the

moon and hope to go further still. But, can any human feet accomplish what a Rāma, a Kṛṣṇa, a Buddha, a Christ, a Caitanya, or a Ramakrishna's feet could do?

Perhaps to some extent they can. These feet can transform a brute into a saint, totally humble an arrogant soul, purify a sinner, convert a stony heart into a soft flower, kill demons by the hundred in the human heart, tame poisonous snakes in us, bring dead spirituality alive, and also give us liberation. The only thing needed is to surrender to this pair of feet. Whose blessed feet are they that can do all this?

Is it not the lotus feet of the guru? ○

Lord Gaṇeśa

There are many stories about how Lord Gaṇeśa got his elephant-head. Of them the one found in the *Brahma-vaivarta-purāṇa* is quite interesting.

Pārvati was childless. She prayed and worshipped Viṣṇu for a long time. Pleased with her devotion, Viṣṇu granted her a boon. Thus, a son, Gaṇeśa, was born.

The news that Śiva and Pārvati had a son spread in all the worlds. There was a great rush in Kailāsa to see the divine child. Among the visitors was Śani, the ill-fated god of fate. Śani had a great disadvantage: owing to a curse from his spouse, he could not look at anyone. If at all he saw anyone, that person would be killed. Śani was therefore reluctant, but courtesy bid him go. He went to Kailāsa and explained his difficulty to Śiva. Śiva would not listen: he showed Śani in. There again, Śani recounted before Pārvati the curse had incurred and said that he would not see the child. A mother's glory is in showing her son to everyone. How could a visitor return without having seen her child? Pārvati pressed Śani to see her child just once. Śani reasoned as much as he could, but upon her repeated cordial insistence, he looked at the child. Instantly the boy's head was blown into pieces. Pārvati was petrified. She wept and wept. Who could console her? The news reached Viṣṇu. He came. On the way he saw an elephant sleeping. He cut its head and brought it to Kailāsa. The head was placed on the child's body. Thus Gajānana was born. Then there was a difficulty. What if Gaṇeśa was not worshipped on account of his strange appearance? Hence he was made the god of success. Hence, before any new venture, it became a custom to invoke Lord Gaṇeśa.

Gaṇeśa Caturthi will be celebrated on the 13th of this month.

IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

A Temple of Learning

Huan Tsang was witness to the glory of the Nalanda university. He stayed there for five years. He wrote in his memoirs that the buildings of Nalanda 'towered above the clouds.' The university had ten thousand resident students of whom many were from different parts of the world. It had over one hundred lecture halls. Its libraries had an enormous collection of literary classics. The revenue of a hundred villages supported the university. To secure admission to this university was not easy; hundreds would apply and only a few would succeed. A million students lived there for twelve years, mastering various disciplines. What about any offence? There were stray cases of such slips too, and the punishment was severe. The transgressor had to wear donkey's skin with the tail near his head and move about in the campus for one full year!

About an Ignoble Practice

The old incident of a lady whose husband had passed away is interesting. That lady wanted to commit *sati*, the dreaded practice of climbing over the husband's funeral pyre and burning oneself to death. A *sati* is a chaste wife who hates to be alive the moment her husband is gone. This lady wanted to do that but her relatives tried to stop her by all means. She then put her finger into the flames. The finger burnt fully, but there was absolutely no reaction from her. To the astonished relatives, she said: 'Don't stop me. Did you not see? Once my husband left, my body has become lifeless.' And to the agony of one and all, she sacrificed herself. Though the practice itself is to be condemned, one can see the spirit and the purity of Indian women.

A Unique Land

Sir John Marshall wrote: 'These discoveries [Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro] establish the existence in Sind (the northern-most province of the Bombay Presidency) and the Punjab, during the fourth and third millennium BC, of a highly developed city life; and the presence, in many of the houses, of wells and bathrooms as well as an elaborate drainage system, betoken a social condition of the citizens at least equal to that found in Sumer, and superior to that prevailing in contemporary Babylonia and Egypt.... Even at Ur the houses are by no means equal in point of construction to those of Mohenjo-Daro.'

The Joy of God-Realization

SWAMI ATMASTHANANDA

What follows is a slightly edited version of a talk given by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, a Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order, at the Vedanta Society of Kansas City, USA, on 20 June 1998.

It is an eye-opener to come to this great country and see its development. The discipline and organization of the American people are really remarkable. I, as an Indian, feel that in this respect nothing remains to be done. But I have also noted that the people, especially the youth, very urgently need the message of Vedanta. Higher values of life are very urgently needed here; spiritual values are very essential. If the leaders of the country, and householders, teachers, professors and others do not learn about such values, all past and present achievements will end in nothing, if not worse. Those who are close to our Vedanta centres will understand very clearly what I am driving at.

The subject given to me is 'The Joy of God-Realization'. First I consider the word joy, next God-realization. And then we shall have to put them together.

When you are thirsty, if you get a glass of cool water or a coke, you feel joy. When you are hungry, a plateful of delicious eatables brings joy. When you take a crying baby in your arms and the baby stops crying and smiles, you have joy. Meeting a friend after a long separation brings joy. You win a lottery and get two million dollars, that brings joy. You were not having good sleep for a few days, and now you had deep sleep, and there is joy.

But what causes the loss of joy, that is sorrow? That we have to understand in depth. We have to understand the negative side and the positive side of joy. Are joy and sorrow physical experiences or mental? They are mental experiences. Thirst and hunger are

not mental experiences; they are physical. What is the connection between the two? Think of the situation inside this body-mind complex. The objective world engages the senses, and the governor of the senses—the mind—monkeys about all the time moving from object to object continuously. What happens when the monkey-mind stops? There is a period of calmness. And it is this calmness which gives us the experience of joy. The pause comes when one desire has been fulfilled and the mind has not yet jumped onto the next. We experience joy in these little pauses. That is to say, joy comes when obstruction to it is removed.

The second part of our topic is God-realization. We read in books about how saints and seers had God-realization. We also read accounts of Sri Ramakrishna going into divine ecstasy. At such times his body-mind complex would be practically dead; he would lose physical consciousness. A stethoscope was used on him once and no heartbeat was felt. Some crude fellows even put hot charcoal on his back, and he did not react. So God-realization means to be merged perfectly, absolutely in God. When this panorama of our daily experiences ceases, that is God-realization.

Now, the joy of God-realization. It is said:

*Yam labdhvā cāparam lābham
manyate nādhikam tataḥ;
Yasminsthito na duḥkhena
gurūṇāpi vicālyate.*

That obtaining which one does not wish to obtain anything more; that established in

which one is not shaken by even serious suffering.¹

Restlessness, throughout life, is due to our unending series of desires. From conception to the graveyard the scenes may change, but desire after desire keeps coming up. Before death, you are conscious that you are dying. But you can speak, you express last-minute wishes and needs. But God-realization is a state beyond desires.

The Upanishad says:

*Ātmānam cedvijānīyād-
ayamasmiti pūruṣaḥ;
Kimicchankasya kāmāya
śarīramanusamjvaret.*

The Atman is to be realized as 'I am That'; seeking what and for the fulfilment of what should we follow the impulses of the body?²

However, the one thing that governs our life is the thought of the protection of our body and health. For that, anything and everything is done: a kidney or heart may be transplanted, and I think there are some efforts going on to transplant even the brain.

As against that, a Sri Ramakrishna or a Holy Mother or a Vivekananda or a Buddha experienced the Truth, Godhood, the Divinity within and the Divinity without.

*Īśā vāsyamidam sarvaṁ
yatkiñca jagatyām jagat;
Tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā
mā grdhaḥ kasyasvid dhanam.³
Agniryathaiko bhuvanam praviṣṭo
rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo babhūva;
Ekastathā sarvabhūtāntarātmā
rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo bahiṣca.
Vāyuryathaiko bhuvanam praviṣṭo
rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo babhūva;
Ekastathā sarvabhūtāntarātmā
rūpaṁ rūpaṁ pratirūpo bahiṣca.⁴*

It is the same fire working as electric-

ity—in the microphone, in the light bulb, running the machine—but it appears to us in different forms. We perceive air in so many forms, but it is the same.

So if we can see God everywhere—in death, beyond flesh and bone, beyond black and white, beyond literate and illiterate—what happens to us? We realize that no one is different from us. They call the appearance of diversity Maya. The real thing is God. God is here, God is there. My existence becomes saturated with God. I cannot take a breath without God. It is all God. Every breath is divine.

Now at last, the monkey mind becomes helpless. It cannot experience duality. Now it is all Thou. The same God that I am seeing here, I am seeing everywhere. So that monkey—the mind—is buried; its activity has stopped. When the mind has got some desire fulfilled and there is a gap before it jumps onto another desire, that is the period that brings us joy. And that holds us on. But once God is realized, that is, once we experience our identity with God and realize that we are the Divine, then what happens? The monkey goes to the burial ground. There is everlasting peace. Joy is disturbed because of restlessness—the distractions of the mind. But once God is realized, the mind becomes one-pointed. It never changes again. Whether it is in life or on the deathbed, or in any circumstance, the mind has only joy.

God experience is a continued experience which cannot be described in words. It is beyond mind and speech, *avānmanasagocaram*. Now, once you have this experience of God-realization, it never goes.

Look at the life of Sri Ramakrishna. After his austere spiritual practices, after having the vision of God, after he experienced the Divine Mother's all-pervading presence, he did not anymore behave in the same way. As long as he was in the world, he behaved like a great human being. Only our vitiated ways of looking at things and foolish behaviour is strange; Sri Ramakrishna's behaviour was not. Sri

1. *Bhagavadgītā*, 6.22.

2. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.12.

3. *Īśa Upaniṣad*, 1.

4. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 2.2.9,10.

Ramakrishna found on the streets of Calcutta some drunkards drinking and dancing and singing. Did he hate them? Did he curse them? No, he did not. He saw God in them; he saw the Divine Mother's presence in them. He said, 'O God, are you playing in this form? Very good, very good. Play.' Sri Ramakrishna saw some fallen people and said, 'Mother, are you here in this form?' This is all-pervasive God-experience.

Here, I shall tell you some wonderful incidents. Some of you know that I had the privilege of attending on Swami Virajananda, a sannyasin disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who had spiritual initiation from Holy Mother. During his last moments, I was standing by his bedside and putting *caraṇāmṛta* (holy water) drop by drop into his mouth and singing the name of God. A physician was standing by my side. All of a sudden the doctor exclaimed, 'What is this?' Tears were trickling down from the outer corners of the swami's eyes. Normally tears trickle down from the inner corners, next to the nose. We have read in the scriptures that tears of joy trickle down from the outer corners. Swami Virajananda had long hair and a beard. The doctor pointed to the swami, drawing my attention to the fact that all his (the swami's) hair was standing on end. The doctor asked, 'What is this?' I told the doctor that the scripture says: 'Tears trickling down from the outer corners of the eyes and hairs all standing on end, indicate spiritual experience and great joy.' Generally, at the time of death, it is a pitiful sight to see the face of a person who is not a God-man, who is very keen to fulfil his desires. But here was a beautiful death.

Another incident. I had the opportunity of studying Vedanta from a senior swami—Swami Jagadananda. He was also a disciple of Holy Mother. He was a great Vedantin, a firebrand Vedantin. I was in Vrindaban, studying scriptures and doing spiritual practices after the passing away of Swami Virajananda. Now, unfortunately for

us, Swami Jagadananda had a heart attack. In those days there was no heart specialist. The swami's doctor started reading *Materia Medica*, and in those days the prescription was to give more and more morphine, and when the extremities turn cold, massage them with brandy. The swami would feel intense pain when these attacks came. After one of those attacks, he was propped up with pillows, and since his extremities were cold I was massaging his legs with brandy. All of a sudden he cried out, 'What are you doing?' I thought the smell of brandy might have been irritating to him, so without mentioning brandy, I told him that the doctor had advised massaging of his legs. 'You are massaging,' he said, 'but have you understood *vijñānam ānandaṁ brahma*? Have you understood that supreme Knowledge and supreme Joy are Brahman? If you have understood that, that is fine. But if you have not understood that, by massaging my legs nothing is going to happen to you.' When the next attack came, leaning on my back he passed away. All of this transpired within forty-five minutes. You see, once we have realized God, there is no gap in God-consciousness. And therefore the mind cannot monkey anymore so as to disturb or affect the divine joy in us.

Swami Madhavananda was in the United States for a short time. He served for many years as General Secretary and later as President of the Ramakrishna Order. Just a little while before he died, I was attending him in the hospital. One evening, he said, 'Let me sit up.' But we knew that whenever we let him sit up, he would begin to vomit and then vomit blood. We tried to explain to him that we could not let him sit up, and we begged him not to ask for that favour. Then he looked at me and said, 'My dear, you do not understand. Very soon the body will fall off. Let me look at them....' He wanted to look at the pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji hung on the wall. He asked in such a way that we could not but comply with his request. So we propped him up with pil-

lows and he was looking at those pictures. Very clearly we could see that he was communicating with them. Then after five or six minutes, he said only 'Ma, Ma, Ma' and was gone.

God-realization means becoming God. You become God in this body and mind. Sri Sarada Devi, a village woman of those days for all practical purposes, was hardly considered literate. But see her behaviour in daily life! How did she treat Swami Saradananda and the rogue Amjad? Did she treat them differently? No, she did not. Mother said, 'I am the mother of all—the mother of the saint and the sinner, the good and the bad.' You see, she saw that it is the same God present everywhere. 'Thou art That.' Wherever her mind went, she experienced the divine Presence.

A fallen woman of Calcutta became very repentant later in her life and felt guilty. She had no peace. Somehow she came to know that in the area of Baghbazar, some distance away, there was a very pious lady, and that whosoever went to her experienced great peace and felt happy. This old woman's friends advised her to go to that lady. One fine morning, after taking a bath in the Ganga and putting on a clean cloth, she went. Holy Mother was at her Udbodhan house. Mother was on the upper floor with women companions attending on her. Unknown persons were never allowed to go up to her room. This old woman arrived there and did not give her identity. The monks said, 'Nobody can see Mother now.' But she was obstinate and told them, 'No, I only want to just touch her feet.' Mother heard all the disturbance and sent some of her companions downstairs to know what the matter was. They came back and reported to her, 'Mother, she is a bad, fallen woman. Why should she come to you?' Mother said, 'You do not know. Can you understand how sick at heart she is, how miserable she is feeling? Go and bring her to me now.' And so the woman was brought to Holy Mother. Did Mother scold her? No; she

hugged that old woman and blessed her and sent her away in peace.

A wicked person may be standing there. But when my eyes are really open, what do I see? It is God, it is the Divine.

We read in the *Gītā* that Sri Krishna shows His universal form to Arjuna, and Arjuna says:

*Paśyāmi devāṁstava deva dehie
sarovāṁstathā bhūtaviśeṣasaṅghān;
Brahmāṇaṁīśaṁ kamalāsanastham-
ṛṣiṁśca sarvānuraḡāṁśca divyān.*⁵

And he also says that he sees the stars, the moon, the sun, the heavens—everything in Krishna, and that all these are going into His body and coming out of it. Finally Arjuna begins to shake. He is afraid. 'My beloved Friend,' he says, 'what am I seeing?' Krishna then reassures him, 'Do not be afraid.'

In the beginning, Arjuna had been afraid to fight. Sri Krishna taught him that he must fight. Sri Krishna revealed the divinity in creation and in everything. But before opening up this vista to Arjuna, He said to him:

*Na tu māṁ śakyase draṣṭum-
anenaiva svacakṣuṣā;
Divyaṁ dadāmi te cakṣuḥ
paśya me yogamaīśvaram.*⁶

'With these eyes—these appendages which are untrained, untutored, undisciplined—you cannot see God. I shall give you divine eyes. Then only you will be able to see Me; you will be able to go deep into it, probe into it, and realize what it is.'

So, dear friends, God-realization means opening of the heart and soul to Truth, and once we are established in Truth which is nothing but joy we become *ānanda* itself: we are filled with bliss. Then we do not see the beautiful or the ugly, saints or sinners. We see that it is all divine. It is all Thou. It is God. Everywhere it is God. Every breath is God. So the result is obviously joy, peace, contentment. If I know someone is my enemy then

5. *Gītā*, 11.15.

6. *Ibid*, 11.18.

there is hostility or hatred. If I have got craze for wealth, then out of greed I may do this or that. But that cannot happen now. I am all-pervading.

This is my experience of God-realization. Everything is in me and I am in everything. Therefore I have no more desire, no more competition, no more worldly love—nothing of the sort. Yes, I know my divinity. I am a monk. How can I tell a lie? Therefore, the joy of God-realization is the eternal joy and the joy of fulfilment which never can be disturbed. And that is the *sum-mum bonum* of life, the only objective of life. May you all attain that state. May you all realize God and thereby make fruitful your birth as human beings.

We are not aware or conscious of our

divinity, there is no difference between animals on four feet and animals on two feet. *Āhāra, nidrā, bhaya, maithuna*—eating, sleeping, fear, procreation—well, animals do the same. But if somehow by God's grace we are successful in attaining Godhood, in realizing our divinity, we become conscious of our true value. So, if all of us become conscious of our divinity, of our Godhood, the greater and the more continuous is the joy. That is why Swami Vivekananda said, 'Religion is the manifestation of the divinity in man.' And that is the fulfilment of life.

May we all attain that state, and may our lives be fruitful, successful, and very, very noble. And may the presence of God be experienced by all of us. That is my prayer. □

How to Control your Mind

Keep the mind always engaged in some work or other; never allow it to remain idle; for no sooner do you leave it unemployed than it will at once make mischief and pester you. Whenever you find the mind unduly restless or overcome with evil thoughts, or discover that you are unable to resist some temptation, or to put down mental excitement in spite of struggle, then leave the place and get away from that adverse atmosphere which may ultimately degrade you. Even if you go out and walk briskly three or four miles in the open air of the country-side, the downward tendency will be checked at least for the time being. There are only two ways of saving oneself from temptation—either fight or flight. But, alas! there is no way to flee and remain away from the mind; either it must be brought under control, or one must get up and down at its bidding.

The whole life of a man is a mass of temptations. The six passions like lust etc are ever awake; they are ever on the look-out for anyone whom they can entrap and devour. One must, therefore, be always awake and alert, must always discriminate between right and wrong, and pray to God.... The moment you slacken, become careless or weak, your enemies...will grow violent and try to fellyou with all sorts of crafty means.

—Swami Virajananda

A Hymn to Krishna

SRI BILWAMANGALACHARYA

On the joyous occasion of Janmāṣṭamī, we present a free translation of some verses from the famous Govinda-dāmodara-stotra of Bilvamangala. Krishna's birthday will be celebrated on 2 September this year.

*Agre kurūṇām-atha pāṇḍavānāin
dulśāsānenā-hṛta-vastrakeśā;
Kṛṣṇā tad-ākrośad-ananyanāthā
govinda dāmodara mādHAVETI.*

When Duṣśāsana pulled her hair and clothes at the crowded court in front of Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, finding no other lord to protect her, Draupadī wept, 'O Govinda! O Dāmodara! O Mādhava!'

*Vikretukāmā kila gopakanyā
murāri-pādārpita-cittavṛttiḥ;
Dadhyādikaṁ mohavaśād-avocad
govinda dāmodara mādHAVETI.*

There was a gopī whose mind was given away to the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Once, she went out to sell milk, curds, etc. Her mind was fixed on Kṛṣṇa. So, instead of calling, 'Milk, please! Milk!' to attract buyers' attention, she cried, 'Govinda! Dāmodara! Mādhava!'

*Kācit-karāmbhoja-pute niṣaṇṇaṁ
krīḍāśukaṁ kiṁśuka-raktatunḍam;
Abhīyāsayāmāsa saroruhākṣī
govinda dāmodara mādHAVETI.*

A little girl had for pleasure sheltered a parrot with great love. She would seat the bird with red beak on her hand and teach it to say, 'Govinda, Dāmodara, Mādhava.'

*Paryāṅkikā-bhājam-alāin kumārāin
prasvāpayantyo-'khīla-gopakanyāḥ;
Jagulī prabandhaṁ svaratāla-bandhaṁ
govinda dāmodara mādHAVETI.*

When their sweet little babies were about to go to sleep, the gopīs would make them lie on their cots and lull them to sleep singing rhythmic lullabies thus: 'Govinda, Dāmodara, Mādhava.'

*Nijāṅgaṇe kaikaṇa-keli-lolāin
gopī grhītvā navanīta-cauram;
Uvāca premṇā-sya pidhāya netre
govinda dāmodara mādHAVETI.*

Baby Kṛṣṇa was playing in the courtyard with his anklets. Overcome by intense maternal love, Mother Yaśodā slowly went and caught hold of him. She closed his lotus-like eyes with her hands and sang affectionately, 'O my Govinda! O my Dāmodara! O my Mādhava!'

*Krīḍāparaṁ bhojana-majjanārthaṁ
hitaiṣiṇī strī tanujaṁ yaśodā;
Ājūhvat prema-pariplutākṣī
govinda dāmodara mādHAVETI.*

Baby Kṛṣṇa was busy playing with friends. He had forgotten food, bath, etc. The lovelorn Mother Yaśodā called him to bathe and eat: 'O dear Govinda! O Dāmodara! O Mādhava!'

*Prabhāta-saṁcāra-gatā nu gāvas-
tad-rakṣaṇārthaṁ tanujaṁ yaśodā;
Prabodhayat pāṇitalena mandaṁ
govinda dāmodara mādHAVETI.*

Early morning. Cows are about to go to the jungle to graze. Little Kṛṣṇa is still asleep. Mother Yaśodā takes her son's tiny hand into her own and like caressing a flower, pats it gently and says in a low tone: 'O my dear Govinda! O Dāmodara! O Mādhava!'

*Prabhātakāle varavallavāstāin
go-rakṣaṇārthaṁ dhṛta-vetra-daṇḍāḥ;
Ākārayāmāsur-anantaṁ-ādyāin
govinda dāmodara mādHAVETI.*

It was morning. The tiny cowherd friends of Kṛṣṇa got ready with staffs in hand

to go to the jungle to graze their cows. They called their dearest buddy, who incidentally was none other than the supreme Lord Himself, saying, 'O Govinda! O Dāmodara! O Mādhava!'

*Govatsa-bālaiḥ śisukāka-pakṣam
badhnantam-ambhojadalāyatākṣam;
Uvāca mātā cibukam grhītva
govinda dāmodara mādhaveti.*

The naughty little Kṛṣṇa was tying the pigtail of a cowherd boy to the tail of a calf. Seeing this, Mother Yaśodā lovingly caressed the soft cheeks of her son and reproved, 'O Govinda! O Dāmodara! O Mādhava!'

*Akrūrayāne yaduvamśa-nātham
saṁgacchamānam mathurām nirīkṣya;
Ūcurviyogāt kila gopabālā
govinda dāmodara mādhaveti.*

Kṛṣṇa was on his way to Mathurā. Ak-rūra was taking him in his chariot. Seeing their dearest friend going away, the cowherd boys cried in pain of separation, 'O Govinda! O Dāmodara! O Mādhava!'

*Dhyeyam sadā yogibhir-aprameyam
cintā-haram cintita-pārijātam;
Kastūrikā-kalpita-nīlavarṇam
govinda dāmodara mādhaveti.*

He whom contemplative yogis can never comprehend fully, who removes all worries, thinking about whom all wishes are fulfilled, whose splendour is like the blue colour of musk (*kastūri*)—such a Lord should be constantly remembered as Govinda, Dāmodara and Mādhava.

*Samsāra-kūpe patito-'tyagādhe
mohāndha-pūrṇe viśayāti-tivre;
karāvalambam mama dehi viṣṇo
govinda dāmodara mādhaveti.*

I have fallen into an expansive well called worldliness which is dark as hell and full of suffering. Please lend me your saving hand, O Govinda! O Dāmodara! O Mādhava!

*Tvāmeva yāce mama dehi jihve
samāgate daṇḍadhare kṛtānte;
Vaktavyam-evam madhuram subhaktiā
govinda dāmodara mādhaveti.*

O my tongue! I beg something of you, which kindly bestow on me. Holding his staff, when the Lord of Death, Yama, comes to end my life, may I repeat with utmost devotion and love these sweet names of the Lord: Govinda! Dāmodara! Mādhava!

*Bhajasva mantram bhavabandha-muktyai
jihve rasajñe sulabham manojñam;
Dvaipāyanādyair-munibhiḥ prajaptam
govinda dāmodara mādhaveti.*

O my tongue! O knower of fine tastes! In order to cut asunder the bondage of worldliness, constantly repeat the sweet mantra, 'Govinda, Dāmodara, Mādhava,' which is easy to repeat, and which was repeated by Vyāsa and other illumined sages.

*Dharā-bharottāraṇa-gopadeha
vihāra-līlā-kṛta-bandhuśeṣa;
Jihve pibasvāmṛtam-etadeva
govinda dāmodara mādhaveti.*

He has assumed a beautiful cowherd boy's form in order to bring peace on earth, and has made the serpent king Śeṣa as his brother in order to sport joyfully here. My tongue, repeat such a Lord's holy names, Govinda, Dāmodara, and Mādhava, always, constantly.

*Śrīkṛṣṇa govinda hare murāre
he nātha nārāyaṇa vāsudeva;
Jihve pibasvāmṛtam-etadeva
govinda dāmodara mādhaveti.*

O my tongue, repeat these nectarine names always, with intense love: Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Govinda, Hare, Murāre, O Lord, Nārāyaṇa, Vāsudeva, Dāmodara, Mādhava.

*Vaktum samartho'pi na vakti kaścid-
aho janānām vyasanābhimukhyam;
Jihve pibasvāmṛtam-etadeva
govinda dāmodara mādhaveti.*

Oh! How sad! How mad we human beings are after worldly things! Even though we are capable of doing so, we do not repeat God's names. And hence we suffer. O my tongue! I tell you, repeat the sweet names, Govinda, Dāmodara, Mādhava, always, and with intense love. □

Charismatic Child Krishna

DR SUMITA ROY

Dr Roy, Associate Professor of English at Osmania University, Hyderabad, writes about the significance of the Krishna incarnation.

Childhood is an endearing phase of human experience. Especially in the spiritual traditions, almost globally, this phase is considered to have a significance worth noting. For instance, we are told that one of the invariables of inwardness is the quality of being childlike. The aura of innocence and the high degree of non-attachment which characterize a child are upheld as models for emulation in the process of inward growth. In addition to this, childhood has often been celebrated in art and literature too, as a glorious though transitory period, whose perpetuation is one of the means for the attainment of realization.

Obviously, the Indian spiritual traditions have also built up an entire canon around this concept of the child as God or the quality of being childlike as necessary in order to be close to God. Instead of merely prescribing the nature of a child as an abstract model, these traditions have attempted to provide living, concrete examples of this. One of these is in the form of the childhood sport (*līlā*) of Lord Krishna. It has also been noted that this charismatic child serves as a map for cultivating *bhakti* in an aspirant who has set his feet firmly on the path which begins the spiritual journey.

The story of this divine child is not new to any Indian. The numerous exploits of Baby Krishna form an essential and inevitable part of our mental nourishment during most of our growing years. The birth of this exceptional infant in the prison on a dark and stormy night appears miraculous in the most satisfying and spiritually sustaining sense of

the term. The birth of hope for his tortured and imprisoned kinsmen becomes metaphoric for us too—as we grow older the trails and troubles, the turbulence which is an inescapable part of existence in the prison of life sees in the child Krishna the light of redemption dawning to save the enslaved beings.

Thus, each year the celebration of this birth, the birth of faith, hope and meaning in a senseless series of experiences which we call life, is the event of renewal and recycling of all that is dark and dreadful in the prison of our selves.

This is *janmāṣṭamī*—an enactment of that glorious scene—where the body is the prison, where the incessant rain and rising tides are the tempests of worldly life, where our capacity to love is Mother Devaki who gave birth to many babies before the coming of Krishna, and where our sincere desire for spiritual growth is the father, Vasudeva, who took the child across a swelling river of *māyā* to grow up in safety in order to fulfil his destiny of combating evil and protecting the pious.

The next phase of Krishna's story takes the form of precocious pranks of the child. Stealing butter is as easy as holding the huge mountain Govardhana on the tip of his finger. As the child effortlessly enacts his role in his self-directed drama and goes through the motions of tending cattle, playing with other cowherd boys, enticing the *gopīs* with his melodious and magical flute, and filling the banks of the river Yamuna with unending bliss, we find ourselves enveloped in inde-

scribable sensations. No heart, however stony, can resist the attraction of Krishna or remain unmoved as this moving saga unfolds. The charisma of the divine child captures our imagination and emotions alike. The pastoral idyll which structures the experiences of Krishna's childhood appear close to paradise when compared to the frenzied urban scene of our experiences.

For a unified consciousness such as that of Sri Ramakrishna, experiences such as these translate themselves into a vision of Reality more real than the one available to us through sensory data. In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* we read about one such vision when Sri Ramakrishna saw an English boy reclining in the same posture as Krishna. The visual impact of this sight was so powerful that he moved far beyond the actuality of it, seeing instead Child Krishna with his flute, leaning in his characteristic stance against one of his favourite trees in Vrindavan. Such a stimulus produced the inevitable result of *samādhi* in the holistic consciousness of Sri Ramakrishna. To him Krishna was no longer merely a part of the imagination, separated by space and time. The English boy and his unusual posture receded to reveal the Child whose love redeems and rejuvenates.

Krishna, thus, is the symbol which stimulates and sustains the aspirant's capacity for love. To make certain sensory data as cores for our contemplative experience is what the above incident illustrates; it is also possibly the highest kind of meditation we can hope to achieve. Since the child is an object of affection universally, meditation on this child seems easy and efficacious.

Another message which Sri Ramakrishna's song proclaims in the *Gospel* is to consider Krishna as one representing the myriad of gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. In one of the most memorable songs the fearful, aggressive and awe-inspir-

ing goddess of destruction, Mother Kali, is entreated to discard her war weapons in favour of Krishna's flute. Quelling her dance of death, she is requested to perform the dance which Baby Krishna did in the arms of his loving mother, Yasoda.

Such an illustration emphasizes the inherent unity amid apparent diversity which a quest for realization reveals. The Master's message of the validity of all modes in spiritual progress uses this interchangeability of Kali and Krishna as a powerful image. The diversity is a matter of fragmented perception and progress on the spiritual path is curative of this illness of fragmentation.

It is obvious that the charisma of the child Krishna which first captures our imagination and provides a cathartic outlet for our dammed emotions, also provides us with a complete course in spiritual discipline. The life of Krishna, from its miraculous beginning to its prophesied end provides us with ample material for spiritual nourishment. The dark-hued God removes darkness within, bringing that bliss of illumination which is an essential component of realization.

To the aspirant then, the charisma of Krishna is the beacon light of guidance. Love which we feel instinctively for the Child is the first step on this path whose goal is the attainment of everlasting peace—the greatest gift life can give. □

Vatsalya, the attitude of a mother toward her child. This was Yasoda's attitude toward Krishna. ... The mother feels happy only when the child has eaten to his heart's content. Yasoda would roam about with butter in her hand, in order to feed Krishna.

—Sri Ramakrishna

Divine Qualities

P. V. NARAYANA SWAMI

The author, from Bangalore, attempts a lucid explanation of divine qualities mentioned in the 16th chapter of the Gita.

According to Sankara, in spite of studying the first fifteen chapters of the *Gita*, the mind of the student still remains confused. This is perhaps the reason for three more chapters which are supplements, as it were, elaborating under three different heads what was dealt with in the earlier chapters. The three are: (1) the life to be led following scriptural injunctions and those practices to be shunned, that are discussed in Chapter 16, and which is the subject-matter of this article; (2) the right type of involvement underscoring faith (*śraddhā*), which is dealt with in Chapter 17; (3) a summing up (*upasaṁhāra*) of the whole teaching, with special emphasis on contemplation, in Chapter 18.

The Contents of the Sixteenth Chapter

The first and foremost consideration in spiritual pursuit is that it is meant to be practised by human beings, the cream of creation. Hence human birth is extolled in scriptures. The understanding and following of the spiritual ideal can be categorized under *upalabdhi*, *saṁsmaraṇa*, *bodha*, and *vairāgya*. *Upalabdhi* refers to the acquisition of the idea, as well as the capacity to analyse and reflect upon it, through which an individual may gain a complete self-awareness. *Saṁsmaraṇa* refers to retentive memory that enables one to recall the injunctions learnt from scriptures and elders. *Bodha* is a comprehensive intellectual understanding of the scriptural presentation of the nature of the ultimate Truth, the capacity to evaluate the ephemeral nature of worldly objects, and the ability to perform spiritual sadhana. *Vairāgya* signifies self-denial which is almost the preliminary step towards spiritual

attainment.

The above characteristics enable one to go along the spiritual path. There is, however, something else needed to attain the Divine. That is the acquisition of divine qualities (*daivī sampat*), and shunning of demoniac qualities (*āsuri sampat*). An *asura* is one who is blinded with emotion and evil instincts, and has a supremely selfish attachment to the world. A *deva*, on the other hand, is nobility incarnate, full of good qualities, full of the desire for higher attainments, and ever careful so as not to get attached to the world. Chapter 16 deals with both these aspects, the divine and the demoniac—the latter in greater detail. Krishna deals with demoniac qualities here not to eulogize them but to warn humanity against their evil influences. We shall consider the divine qualities alone.

Illustrating the Two Natures

The term *dhṛtarāṣṭra* is often used in the *Gita* to mean the Kaurava king. Now, this term is an illustration of both types—the divine and the demoniac. Understood to mean *dhṛta*, that is the Self, and *rāṣṭra* (*sāmrājya*), that is the empire, it implies self-restraint which is a *daivī sampat*: it means one who has controlled the self. The word can also be interpreted as *dhṛtam* 'seized', *rāṣṭram* 'country', indicating *āsuri sampat*—appropriating through deceit another's kingdom for oneself. It also allegorically signifies the perpetual conflict between the forces of good and evil in the mind of the human being. The beast-like personality of Duryodhana has to be avoided by all means. In contrast, the divine nature of the great soul (*mahātmā*) Yudhishtira has to be

assiduously cultivated, nourished and protected.

The fight between the *asuras* and the *devas* is the subject-matter in epics and Puranas. In the *Ramayana*, Rama typifies the very embodiment of righteousness (*Ramo vigraha-vān dharmatā*) and Ravana its very antithesis. The *Mahabharata* is no less effective in inculcating the supremacy of good over evil, culture over anarchy.

In Chapter 9, Sri Krishna has briefly said in verses 11 and 12 that ungodly persons do not realize God. Possibly elaborating on that idea in the sixteenth chapter, he has emphasized 26 items as the qualities of a godly person. These divine qualities are only a gist of what is listed at great length in the 'Santi-parva' of the *Mahabharata*. Sri Krishna amplifies on the nature of *asuras* with the basic objective that one should know those traits so as to avoid them.

An Appraisal of Divine Qualities

It is most appropriate that the group of divine traits is headed by fearlessness (*abhaya*), because it is the basis of all the other virtues, and Sri Krishna places last in the list humility (*nātimānitā*), the rearguard of the array of qualities. Thus the alpha and omega of righteous conduct are listed in a convincing order—unflinching courage on the one hand and innate humility on the other.

We discuss below in some detail each of the items on the list of divine qualities since this forms the crux of Sri Krishna's teachings in Chapter 16. These divine qualities are very relevant today.

Godliness and fear can never coexist. 'Be a hero. Always say, "I have no fear." Tell this to everybody—"Have no fear." Fear is death, fear is sin, fear is hell, fear is unrighteousness, fear is wrong life. All the negative thoughts and ideas that are in this world have proceeded from this evil spirit of fear,' says Swami Vivekananda. We should ever remember that the Divine is always permanent (*nitya*), beyond the three bodies—gross, sub-

tle and causal, and beyond all duality. This being so, when we focus our mind only on scriptural truths, our activities are centred in them, and when we have absolute faith in God, we become fearless. Remembering that the changeless God is behind changing objects endowed with name and form, and enthused with the self-assurance of playing one's role under God's protective umbrella, fear disappears. We take every vicissitude of life in our stride. Purity of mind (*sattvasamśuddhi*) comes next. Whatever we do should be performed in a *sāttvika* mood, reminding ourselves that happiness is purely internal. The *sāttvika* mood should prevail in thought, word and deed. We should kindle this light of *sattva* through the performance of dedicated action. Our behaviour should be honest. We should dive deep into the recesses of our mind to get an answer to the question: What is knowledge? If we supplement this effort with *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*, we acquire purity of mind which enables us to see no distinctions between our own welfare and that of others. Persistence in knowledge and yoga (*jñānayogavyavasthiti*) is persistent application to knowledge through *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*. This leads us to constant practice or yoga. There should be constant reflection on the ultimate Truth which is Brahman, the basic substratum. *Jñāna* also enables us to distinguish between *preyas* and *śreyas*—what is pleasurable and what is beneficial, what is ephemeral and what is everlasting. In giving gifts (*dāna*) we should be alert to the needs of the receiver and aware also of our capacity to fulfil those needs. We should give happily, without hurting the recipient's feelings. The gift should be spontaneous, given with love, kindness and humility, and without expectation of return. Swami Vivekananda says in this matter: '...it is written in our books that a man should always be charitable even to the extreme. If a man starves himself to death to help another man, to save that man's life, it is all right; it is even held that a man ought to do that.' Re-

straint (*dama*), control of the external organs, should be done by holding firmly to right values declared in scriptural texts. Curbing the outgoing turbulent senses is the first rung in the ladder of spiritual discipline. Sacrifice (*yajña*) should be the idea behind our performing all activities connected with our own *svadharma*, ie, the *nitya* and the *naimittika*—the daily chores and occasional rituals—in a proper spirit. In today's language, it is doing public good with an eye towards self-effacement on the part of the performer. Study of the scriptures (*svādhyāya*) is the next divine quality. Scriptures are a rich legacy handed down by saints, seers, prophets and incarnations from time to time. We should draw inspiration from these. *Svādhyāya* also implies reflection and contemplation on our own true identity. Austerity (*tapas*) envisages disciplining the body and controlling the turbulent mind so that healthy tendencies are developed. Austerity brings not only mental purity and freedom from *saṁskāras*, it also hastens our approach to Truth.

Straightforwardness (*ārjava*), the opposite of crookedness, involves integration of thought, speech and action into a harmonious whole. Non-injury to any being, either physically or mentally (*ahimsā*), is yet another noble quality since all beings are verily manifestations of God. Recognizing this sacredness is *ahimsā*, for it manifests itself as love towards all beings. Truthfulness (*satya*) calls for absolute correlation between thought and speech without being hurtful, as also a correct appreciation of the lower truth in which we live and the higher Truth which is our goal. Our mind, speech and action are to be so coordinated as to glorify God's greatness, that is Truth. Absence of anger (*akrodha*) comes next. If a person can calm down his perturbed mind so that it becomes unruffled and uninfluenced despite provocation, he is said to have controlled his mind and contained his anger. As Sri Krishna says, desire, or rather obstructions to its fulfilment, rouses anger. Absence of anger implies lack of desires and the percep-

tion of God's will in all occurrences. Renunciation (*sarva-saṅga-parityāga*) is the giving up of undue attachment to family, friends, relatives, wealth, power, name and fame, and such others. More than that, it is the renunciation of one's own ego. The realization that all things, both sentient and insentient, belong to *Īśvara* will help develop *tyāga*. We are merely custodians of the things entrusted to us. Peace of mind (*śānti*) originates from self-control, a balance in life, and desirelessness. Poise and equilibrium of mind mean serenity. Absence of guile, slander or calumny (*apaiśuna*) is not to carry disparaging tales about others, especially behind their backs. This quality is vital in the cultivation of our character. The basis for genuine compassion for all living beings in distress (*dayā*) is the firm conviction that the Lord pervades everywhere and everything. This is analogous to *sarva-bhūta-hite-rati*, a sincere feeling of joy in others' welfare. Non-covetousness (*aloluptva*) is not entertaining fanciful ideas to acquire others' possessions. This also implies the absence of excitement of the organs in the presence of objects. Gentleness of mind (*mārdava*) is a virtue which displays nobility of heart and also of cultural refinement. Modesty (*hrī*) is a quality born of true Self-knowledge. This will make a person natural and good. Such a person is never susceptible to praise since he is always aware of his limitations. He feels embarrassed when others pay him encomiums. Absence of restlessness (*acāpala*) is yet another divine quality referred to by Sri Krishna. The more a person is indrawn, the more will he become stable and composed. The greater a person's awareness of his inner divinity, the greater will be his freedom from restlessness. The sign of overcoming a fidgety nature is reflected in our movements, specially in vision and speech. With the practice and perfection of the above-mentioned virtues, we become pure and glorious. Others can instantly notice our virtues. It is like recognizing a person's goodness by the way he deals with us. Splendour or vigour (*tejas*) is an obvious lustre on

our person born of the innate divine essence. A person endowed with *tejas* shines, as it were. Forgiveness (*kṣamā*) shows our inner strength. It reflects a mind which is of a high state. It is ever held in equipoise, even when offended. As Swami Vivekananda says, it is not the weak that can forgive, but the strong. It is only strong characters that can forgive those who malign them or hurt them. Fortitude (*dhṛti*) refers to the mental capacity to remove all fatigue of the body and the organs which thereby become rejuvenated. Cleanliness (*śauca*), both internal and external, means purity of mind and cleanliness of the body. It is only in a pure heart that God's love is manifested. And a clean body is an aid to mental purity. Absence of malice (*adroha*) is not being treacherous, avoiding thoughts of hatred, malice or of inflicting injury in any form. A devotee is a blessing to the world. He being full of love for God has nothing whatsoever to do with the world. All that he does is help everyone as much as he can and to look upon everyone as God. As he has no wants or desires, he has no malice and such other evil qualities. Absence of haughtiness (*atimānitā*), stated positively, is humility. A person endowed with divine qualities is always conscious of his own smallness in the eyes of God. He never looks upon himself as having some great prowess. In spite of vast learning, spiritual attainments and so on, the devotee is humble. He knows fully well that if the Lord so wishes, he can create a million great souls from dust. It is therefore his second nature to honour everyone, himself avoiding honour by all means. Limitless happiness which we crave will be achieved through attainment of the goal of human life. We should therefore have a discerning will, absolute sincerity of purpose and an unbroken perseverance in our spiritual pursuit. In stark contrast, when the above-mentioned values are conspicuous by their absence, we are considered to be demoniac. It is this evil nature that causes bondage. Both the ends, complete release and bondage, are actuated by innate

tendencies, divine ones paving the way for liberation and demoniac ones leading to bondage. Sri Ramakrishna therefore used to remark that in some cases, spiritual progress would be rapid while in others, it would take time. This is owing to the innate tendencies.

In the sixteenth chapter, after speaking about the divine qualities, Sri Krishna speaks about the demoniac qualities in some detail, and underscores a few negative traits which mark the beginning of a person's downfall—passion, anger and greed. It is for us to guard against them. All the other bad features are traceable to these three. Sri Krishna therefore says that these three should be forsaken. The abandonment of passion, the gradual realization that this world and its joys are evanescent, gives rise to dispassion (*vairāgya*); the forsaking of anger enables us to attain equanimity of outlook and mental poise; avoiding greed, we develop contentment, the greatest wealth we can have. These traits will take us along the beneficial path (*śreyas*).

Now, how do we avoid the three gates to hell (*trividhaṁ narakasya dvāram*), lust, anger and greed? Sri Krishna answers by asking us to cultivate the divine traits. The 'Santiparva' of the *Mahabharata* says: '*Buddhireva pramāṇaṁ syād śāstrāśāstra vyavasthitau*—intelligence is our sole guide regarding what is sanctioned or not scripturally.' But an unintelligent man is like a blind man to whom a mirror is useless: he has no use of scriptures. (*Yasya nāsti svayaṁ prajñā, śāstraṁ tasya karoti kim; Netrābhyāṁ tu vihinasya darpaṇaḥ kim kariṣyati.*) Like Nature's bounty, the scriptures are there, teaching us the noble paths to God. Just as it is for us to use or not to use Nature, we should decide about learning from the scriptures, so as to reach the goal. □

To understand a great man we must ourselves be great; to reach a fruit on the highest branch of a tree, we must raise ourselves....

—Swami Ramakrishnananda

RELIGION AND LIFE



Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

Is there any qualitative difference between keeping count and not doing so in japa?

Mental japa (*mānasa japa*) is the best. If, however, the mind is not getting concentrated or balanced you may count japa on your fingers. But mental japa is most desirable.

Can we perform japa while working?

You may, provided it does not become a hindrance to your work. For instance, while boiling milk, just because you are engaged in japa the milk on the oven should not spill over.

While doing work, japa will be mechanical, isn't it, Maharaj?

Initially it may be so, but gradually you will have to infuse sincerity into it.

Is japa necessary if the mind naturally gets oriented towards God?

If a person's mind is spontaneously absorbed in divine thoughts, then japa is no longer necessary in his case, because the purpose of japa is to fix the mind firmly on God.

But, Maharaj, the guru's directive is to perform japa; what then?

Directives depend upon place, time and person. What is the need of a fan when cool breeze is blowing? Probe your mind deeply. As the mind's proximity to God increases, its thirst for worldly possessions decreases proportionately; all doubts about God go away and the mind becomes absorbed in His thoughts alone.

There is a beautiful verse in the *Bhāgavata* [11.2.42]:

Bhaktiḥ pareśānubhavo viraktir-

*anyatra caiṣa trika ekakālah;
Prapadyamānasya yathāśnataḥ syus-
tuṣṭiḥ puṣṭiḥ kṣudapāyo'nughāsām.*

When a person suffers from hunger, he feels discontent and physical weakness. But when he gets food, he feels contentment in his mind, becomes strong physically, and his pain of hunger also disappears. Similarly, devotion to God and realization of His true nature without any trace of doubt, and aversion to worldly possessions—all these three are attained simultaneously by a person who places his faith in God.

Maharaj, is it true that the more a person does japa, the more grace and strength he obtains?

God's grace is not conditional; His grace cannot be bartered. However, strength may increase.

What will happen to those of us who cannot spare more than ten minutes for japa and meditation?

Had the attraction been there, you would have surely spared more time. You do spend a considerable amount of time with your child, do you not? ... Ask Him how to grow your affinity towards Him. Pray to Him so that you may feel attracted to Him. Once that happens, you will not be able to part company with Him. You must have read in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: Many people would come, accompanying the Master's devotees. But most of them were not interested in listening to him. They would ask their friends, 'When will you leave?' After some time, they would say, 'All right, you stay here but we shall wait for you in the boat.'

Maharaj, what is meant by the phrase japāt siddhiḥ?

God-realization (*siddhi*) can be attained through the performance of japa. Repeat God's name as much as you can.

'In this Kaliyuga, you see, people are averse to meditation and japa.' Why did Sri Ramakrishna say this?

It means that ordinary people are so feeble-minded and restless that they cannot perform japa and meditation for long. In fact, Ramakrishna did not forbid anyone: those who are capable should practice japa and meditation. The *Bhāgavata* [1.1.10] says:

*Prāyeṇa-ālpāyusaḥ sabhya
kalāvasmīn yuge janāḥ;
Mandāḥ sumanda-matayo
mandabhāgyā hyupadrutāḥ.*

'In this Kaliyuga, O great one, people are shortlived. They are also lazy, dull-witted and unlucky.'

Maharaj, on occasion, while performing japa, something happens—it is not exactly slumber. Is that suśupti?

No, that is not *suśupti* but a temporary state of mental forgetfulness (*vismṛti*).

Can it be termed as laya?

No, it cannot. That state is not *laya*. *Suśupti* is a hindrance to spiritual practice.

Why is suśupti a hindrance?

It is a hindrance because you forget even the ideal you are to concentrate on. In the *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā* [3.44], it is said:

*Laye sambodhayet cittam
vikṣiptam śamayet punaḥ;
Sakaśāyam vijānīyāt
samaprāptam na cālayet.*

The meaning of this verse is this: 'If the *citta* begins to merge into *suśupti*, concentrate it on the Self. If it is distracted, make it calm again. If it is between these two states—*suśupti* and *vikṣipta*—do not disturb it.'

In the state of *laya*, the mind lapses into

inaction and forgetfulness; you will then have to arouse it with effort to remain conscious of the ideal. When the mind wanders into other domains it has to be steadied and brought back to its proper focus. And ecstasy—if you wish to enjoy the bliss of Brahman with attributes—is also an obstacle to your goal. However, once your mind becomes steady, these will no longer have any effect on you.

Is practising ajapa-japa advisable?

Ajapa means japa with each breath—synchronizing the repetition of the name of God with respiration. That is, '*śvāsa-praśvāsayor-bahir-gamana-āgamanābhyām akṣara-niṣpāda-rūpo japaḥ*.' It has a rhythm, and unless the rhythm is properly maintained, normal respiration is affected, thereby causing ailments.

Can ajapa-japa be practised during sleep?

No, it cannot. This can only be practised when you are awake.

There is a Bengali song in which ajapa is mentioned: 'ajapa jadi phurāi—if ajapa is exhausted.' What does this mean?

Here *ajapa* means respiration; it signifies that breathing has stopped because it has been totally exhausted in repeating the name of God constantly. This has been expressed as the 'exhaustion' of *ajapa*. A particular song of Ramprasad says, 'So long as I can breathe my last with Kali's name on my lips.'

When shall we feel real attraction for Him?

It will be when He bestows His grace. Now, we feel it is all right even without His mercy. When that is no longer so, then attraction for His grace will grow. When you feel restless for His mercy, then only will it come. You can divert the child's attention with toys for a while; but then it will again seek its mother after some time.

—Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

An Advaitin's Tale

DR HILTRUD RÜSTAU

Hiltrud Rüstau from Germany provides a attractive account of Narayana Guru who passed away in September over seven decades ago.

The impact of Swami Vivekananda's speeches at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, as also the foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897, on the development of Hinduism can hardly be overestimated. This holds true also for religious movements within Hinduism which were founded after these events.

One of the most important religious movements in southern India which today is of importance in Kerala is the movement started by Sri Narayana, which has some special characteristics. The majority of founders of religious movements within Hinduism in our days belong to the upper castes; they were brahmins or belonged to castes traditionally connected with trade, business, administration or to the newly educated intellectual strata of the colonial society. From this point of view Sri Narayana is an exception. He belonged to the Īrava caste which was ranged at the top of the so-called outcastes in Kerala and he did not get any modern education.

The rigidity of the caste system in southern India of those days is well known. In the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century numerous different movements against social disabilities which beset the life of the lower castes in this state came into being. Today not much is known about them outside Kerala. But the religious movement founded by Sri Narayana Guru at the beginning of the 20th century is still very much alive and plays a vivid role in the religious, social, cultural and political life of Kerala, and his name is well known all over India.

Sri Narayana Guru (Narayana Asan) was born on 26 August 1856 (or 1854) in

Chempazhanthi near Thiruvananthapuram. He grew up in a rural environment. His father was most probably a teacher and astrologer who did also some farming. Two of the boy's uncles were Ayurvedic physicians, a profession very common among Īravas, and so he had early access to Sanskrit manuscripts. He got some primary education in the village school and started to study Sanskrit. Later on he was sent for further studies to a well-known Sanskrit scholar, who was by caste a Nair. So he could acquire a comprehensive knowledge of ancient Sanskrit texts. His studies included the Malayalam and Tamil cultural heritage. Later on he took lessons in Yoga and Tantra. He started a Sanskrit school and was married, but the marriage was most probably never consummated. He left his family and became a *parivrājaka*, who was restlessly wandering, meditating, and also preaching and healing here and there. Similar to Swami Vivekananda he came to know the sorrows and sufferings of the common people. He made friends with Muslims, had discussions with Christian missionaries and Sanskrit scholars, and took food from outcastes and lepers. But in contrast to Swami Vivekananda he confined his wanderings to southern parts of India. In those days this meant mainly the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, the Malabar region and the Madras Presidency.

In Aruvippuram, where he stayed for a long time, he attracted the interest of the local people who came to see the yogi and were fascinated by his healing capacity. Eventually, the need for a temple arose, and on Sivaratric day in 1888 Sri Narayana Guru did

something unheard-of until then: he performed the *pratiṣṭhā*, the installation ceremony, of a *śivaliṅgam* in a small shrine. This *liṅgam* was a stone picked up by Sri Narayana Guru from the bed of the river Neyyar. In doing this he infringed the brahminical laws according to which the installation of sacred images was the absolute monopoly of brahmins.

In the years to follow Sri Narayana Guru consecrated at least 29 temples in Travancore and Cochin, two in the Madras Presidency and one in the Mysore state. Most of them are Siva temples. Siva according to Sri Narayana Guru was considered to be the god of the lower caste people. Though in the sanctum sanctorum we find *śivaliṅgams* also, the temple in Thelissary is supposed to be a Jagannatha temple and the temple in Mangalore is called Tirupati temple. These names were given to the temples in order to demonstrate that there was no need for costly pilgrimages to Puri or Tirupati. To visit the temples in Thelissary or Mangalore was declared to be of equal religious merit.

In course of time Sri Narayana Guru tried to lead the worshippers to a more abstract understanding of God. So, in the Kalakandeswaram temple in Murukkumpuzha (30 km from Thiruvananthapuram) there is a *śivaliṅgam* in the sanctum sanctorum, and above it a bronze plate. The words truth (*satya*), virtue or duty (*dharma*), mercy or compassion (*dayā*) and peace (*śānti*) are written on it in Malayalam.¹ In Shertallay-Kalavamkodam a mirror with 'Om' in Malayalam script was installed behind the image of Ardhanarisvara to remind the worshipper of '*tat tvam asi*'—the unity of the Absolute and the self.

1. It is wrong to say that Sri Narayana Guru put a lamp (*prabhā*) in the sanctum of this temple. The term '*prabhā*' in Malayalam means not lamp but light or reflection, and a lamp is not to be seen. For this information I thank V. Manoj, Thiruvananthapuram.

This founding of temples played a very important role in Sri Narayana Guru's endeavours for religious and social reform. A temple according to Sri Narayana Guru was not only a sacred place but was simultaneously of much social significance. Temples should be clean and beautiful. Educational institutions, reading-rooms or libraries should be attached to them and they should be open to everybody. In connection with the founding of temples his endeavour was also to change superstitious customs and certain rituals which were very costly and indecent. He invented a simple marriage ceremony and stressed the importance of interdining and intermarriage in order to overcome the bane of caste system. The temples he established were characterized by some new features, for they stand for a democratization process within Hinduism and they became real centres of the local social and religious life.

After the consecration of his first temple in Aruvippuram, Sri Narayana Guru became very popular. So it can easily be explained why a certain Dr Palpu got interested in him. Dr Palpu was one of the very first Īravas who could acquire higher education, but he did not get any governmental job in Travancore because of his caste. He dedicated his life to the Īrava cause. In 1893 he met Swami Vivekananda in Mysore and asked him for some advice about how to improve the condition of the untouchables in the south. Swami Vivekananda told him to get organized under a religious leader, because no reform in India could be effected without the halo of religion.² So it is understandable that Dr Palpu went to meet Sri Narayana Guru, about whom he had already heard a lot, and together with others they founded in 1903 the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP Yogam) to fight social injustice and secure the legitimate rights of the underprivileged people. Therefore it is justified to say

2. C.R. Mitra, *Sri Narayana Guru and Social Revolution* (Shertallay, 1979), p. 60.

that 'the SNDP Yogam of Kerala was actually formed on the granite foundation of Swami Vivekananda's moral advice.'³ In honour of Swami Vivekananda the journal of the SNDP was named *Vivekodayam*. Dr Palpu was in contact with Swami Vivekananda since he had met him first before he went to Chicago. It is said that he got a letter from Vivekananda for Sister Nivedita in Britain who knew many members of the British Parliament, so that with her support in 1897 the discrimination against the Īravas was discussed in the British Parliament for the first time.

Till 1907 the headquarters of the new movement was in Aruvippuram; then it changed to Sivagiri at Varkala. In 1912 the Sarada temple there was consecrated. In the following years Narayana Guru spent much time in Aluve where the Advaita Ashrama was built. He travelled within southern India, and on the invitation of some Īravas and others he went to Ceylon in 1918, and again in 1923. In 1923 the first All Religions Conference was organized at the Advaita Ashrama in order to commemorate the Chicago World's Parliament of Religions of 1893. It was the first of its kind in India in which Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and representatives of different Hindu groups participated. The conference was arranged by Sri Narayana Guru in order to promote religious harmony. Time and again such interreligious conferences were organized during the following years.

Sri Narayana Guru died on 20 September 1928. His humanistic world view, his life-long struggle against caste discrimination as also his work towards the improvement of the common man's life were firmly rooted in Advaita Vedanta philosophy. Somewhat similar to Vivekananda's ideas he also made Vedanta practical; ie he connected the belief in the fundamental unity of the world with his socio-philosophical views and furthermore, spread these views among the common people.

Among the texts he preferred most was the *Īśa Upaniṣad*. Fundamental sources of his worldview were the *Śaivasiddhānta*, the *bhakti* tradition of the Nāyars and Ālvārs, Valmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patanjali, besides the *prasthāna-traya* (the Upaniṣads, the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Brahma Sūtras*) in general. His philosophical thoughts were mainly expressed as hymns and poems mostly in Malayalam; but he also wrote in Sanskrit, and a few in Tamil. Besides this he translated books from Sanskrit and Tamil (part of Tiruvalluvar's *Tirukkural*, for example) into Malayalam.

His religio-philosophical interest was determined by the search for the recognition of the Absolute in everything, and at the same time, by the deep feeling for the real problems of social life. His conclusion was: 'One in kind, one in faith, one in God is man. Of one same womb, one same form, difference none there is at all.'⁴ This conclusion he drew out of the famous '*tat tvam asi*, That thou art.' The non-dualistic view of the Advaita Vedanta has no place for divisiveness and distinction between individual and individual. That means Sri Narayana Guru made already evident what B. R. Ambedkar stated some years later, namely, the social implication of *tat tvam asi*. Ambedkar recognized 'the tremendous value as a foundation for democracy' contained in this great statement. '...there cannot be the slightest doubt that no doctrine could furnish a stronger foundation for democracy than the doctrine of Brahma [in the sense of '*sarvaṃ khalvidam brahma*, everything is Brahman'—H.R.]. It makes democracy an obligation of one and all.' But it had been without any social effect, Ambedkar concluded.⁵

Sri Narayana Guru was an Advaitin

4. S. Omana, *Philosophy of Sri Narayana Guru* (Varkala: Narayana Gurukula, 1984), p. 33.

5. B.R. Ambedkar, 'Riddles in Hinduism' in *Writings and Speeches* (Bombay: Educational Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1987), Vol. 4, p. 286.

3. Ibid., p. 61.

who followed Sankara. This world is not what is seen from outside. It seems to be real when the mind is less critical; but when it awakens there is only pure *cit* or *arūpa* (Malayalam), that is intelligence, consciousness or Brahman. If the mind starts questioning, the mind disappears in consciousness and that in turn disappears into the Absolute. There is essential non-difference with the Absolute, but in contrast to Sankara Sri Narayana Guru is of the opinion that this highest truth is not beyond the comprehension of reason: what is beyond the mind and the senses can still be grasped by reason.

Sri Narayana Guru combined the Advaitic concept of Sankara with the love of God of Ramanuja. That means he gave another interpretation to *māyā* than Sankara, as he combined it with the devotional bipolarity between the finite self and the Absolute. Whereas *māyā* in the understanding of Sankara is to be understood as the veil of ignorance, which means that the phenomenal world is given the status of illusion, the world according to Ramanuja is real. Sri Narayana Guru connected both the concepts: the world is real but not what it seems to be. The obstacle to be overcome and the reason for all suffering and sorrow is *avidyā* in the case of Sankara and the involvement in *karma* in the case of Ramanuja.

Sri Narayana Guru like Sankara stresses the oneness of the self with the Absolute prior to its individuation as the finite self, but like Ramanuja, he believes in the grace of God for salvation. The world is a creation of *māyā* and *avidyā*, so far he follows Sankara, but he does not separate *māyā* from God as anything evil. *Māyā* is the creative energy. He follows Ramanuja when he speaks about *ullāsa*, the joy of God, which is the same as Ramanuja's *līlāvibhūti*. 'This world of manifestation is like a sportive display of *māyā*, who conceals her forms and creates everything with her essence.'⁶ The phenomenal world is a veil

woven out of the threads of time and space and worn by the Mother to hide her real form. Finitude and infinitude exist side by side; therefore it is not possible to determine with any certainty which of these two experiences is true.

Finally, the phenomenal world is reduced to the transcendental reality of pure consciousness. But this Sri Narayana Guru combines with the devotional longing for the grace of God, often understood as Mother.

Sri Narayana Guru does not declare the world as illusion or false. That means he does not equate *māyā* with *avidyā*. So he does not question the reality of the empirical world. The phenomenal world and the Absolute are not basically different. The reality of this world is the unity of that which is transcendental and beyond human understanding and that which is real and can be perceived. But if one has reached the realization of the non-dual Reality, union with the Absolute becomes possible. This is the highest aim, but it does not demand the negation of the ego-sense. The Absolute as the most adorable thing has to be seen everywhere. Everything is a transformation of the Absolute, this world has no other reality than within this Absolute so that the recognition of the identity of 'I' with everything is the highest bliss.

Sri Narayana Guru defined Atman, the Self, as *arivu*, consciousness, and as Brahman. It is the unity of the knower and the known. It is the undeniable truth of everything, and so everything is real. But at the same time I and you are one. There is no difference between the other one and myself. Instead of the otherness of the fellow being Sri Narayana Guru stresses the sameness: 'All are of one self-fraternity.'⁷ The ultimate Reality exists everywhere in innumerable forms, manifested in everything that exists. Out of this results the interrelatedness of the human individual with all other human beings,

In this way he makes evident the ethical

6. S. Omana, op. cit., p. 149.

7. Ibid., p. 153.

implication of the statement '*tat tvam asi*.' Main stress is laid on the unity of everything in the self or in the Absolute so that one's self-expression means the happiness of all. Out of this results the demand that one should not fight one's own fellow beings. In his *Ātmopadeśa Śataka* (verses 21-25) he said: 'One should know that his experiencing of happiness is the same as another one's too. What is dear to another should spell endearment to me also.... Therefore whatever one does for one's own good should be so intended as to make it beneficial to others too.... What is known as that person or this person, when carefully considered, is the one undifferentiated form of the primeval Self. Whatever one does for the happiness of one's own self should also include the happiness of others. What is good for one and might cause disaster to another is opposed to the unity of the Self.'⁸

It was without any doubt a tremendous philosophical achievement to make evident the ethical implication of the non-dualistic philosophy of Vedanta, but even more important and of long-lasting effect was the social interpretation he gave. Sri Narayana Guru stressed the fact that belief in *varṇa* and *jāti* was incompatible with the fundamental doctrine of non-duality. It could only destroy the unity and integrity of the human race and hamper the development of the individual and of nations as well. The caste system of Sri Narayana Guru had to be seen as the main obstacle of the social, economic and political development of the country. He showed that the philosophical concept of *tat tvam asi* leaves no place for distinctions between man and man as they are taught in the caste doctrine.

Closely linked with Sri Narayana Guru's monistic worldview is his understanding of religion. He aimed at establishing a universal

religion. Every religion should be tolerated, because all religions have the same theoretical foundations, which is that one's own happiness should be the happiness of others. There is only one religion because there is only one God. Sri Narayana Guru said that it has to be taken as a false notion that religions vary, that there are many religions. The ideal religion in the eyes of Sri Narayana Guru could be characterized as the spiritual doctrines of the Hindu Yoga, the non-violence of Buddha, the love of Jesus, and the brotherhood of Muhammad.⁹ Spiritual and physical betterment also should result from religion. Not idols or costly religious ceremonies but purity of heart and devotion should be at the centre of religion.

Much could also be said of Sri Narayana Guru as a social reformer. There were two goals behind all his endeavours: the abolishment of the caste system, and the improvement of the economic situation with the help of education, social reforms, industrial development, hygienic improvements as also by overcoming religious superstitions and antiquated customs.

Sri Narayana Guru was a religious and social reformer, a philosopher in his own right, and a poet. In his view the social, political and religious goals were inseparably linked. In almost one hundred years of its existence the movement founded by him has proved its vitality. It is unique from different points of view, especially due to its *avarṇa* background. It has changed the social and cultural life of Kerala dramatically, and the ethical interpretation Sri Narayana Guru gave to the famous *mahāvākya*, '*tat tvam asi*', has still something to say in our time to everyone who is really interested in Advaita philosophy. □

8. Ibid., p. 120.

9. Jerald J. Pereira, *Narayana Guru: A Social Educator* (Varkala: R.R. Publishers, 1989), p. 46.

A Little Flower's Life

PARAMITA DAS

A pleasing saint of France passed away on 30 September over a century ago. Her life and inspiration form the theme of this attractive article by Mrs Paramita Das, Head of the Department of French, Calcutta University.

'I feel that my mission is about to begin, my mission to make God loved as I love Him, to teach souls my little way.' St Therese of Lisieux spoke these words on 17 July 1897, a few months before her death on 30 September 1897. When her sister, Mother Agnes, asked her, 'What is this little way you want to teach to souls?' Therese answered: 'It is the way of spiritual childhood, the way of trust and absolute surrender.'

A captain during the Restoration, Therese's grandfather took up residence at Alencon in 1830. Alencon, the chief town of Orne, was a quiet little town. It owed its fame solely to the art of its lacemakers who exported the famous 'Point d' Alencon' to all parts of France and especially to Paris.

Orderly, methodical, of a solitary and meditative temperament, Louis Martin, Therese's father, learned the watchmaking trade. Zelig, her mother, was born into a family of peasant background. She too was brought up in a military atmosphere as her father terminated his career in the gendarmes.¹ Zelig dreamed of the religious life just as Martin did, and like him, she was refused when she sought permission to join the Sisters of the Hotel Dieu at Alencon. Then she took up the manufacture of 'Point d' Alencon' and was supremely successful.

Refused entrance into the religious life, the watchmaker of 35 and the lacemaker of 27

met, and after a short engagement were married on 13 July 1858.

There reigned in the Martin family a solid faith which saw God in all events of life, paying Him a permanent homage: family prayers together, morning attendance at Mass, frequent reception of Holy Communion—rare in an epoch when Jansenism² continued its ravages, Sunday vespers, retreats. Their whole life revolved around the liturgical year, pilgrimages, a scrupulous regard for fasts and abstinences, respecting and helping the poor.

Therese, the youngest of the five daughters, was born on 2 January 1873. Blond, blue-eyed, very attractive, precocious, lively, very touchy, capable of outbursts of temper, stubborn (all in stark contrast to the soft nature in later life), the child immediately became the favourite and was 'devoured by kisses' of the whole family. She was to say in later life, 'All my life God was pleased to surround me with love, and my first memories are imprinted with the most tender smiles and caresses.'

2. Founded by Otto Cornelius Jansen, Jansenism was chiefly a revolt against Protestants and also Jesuits. Popular during the 17th and 18th centuries in France, Italy and some other countries, Jansenism's main issue was the reconciliation between human freedom and divine grace. Upholding Augustinian views, Jansen strongly advocated the older method of the importance of divine grace against counter-Reformationists. —Editor.

1. A member of the French police force.

When she was only a child of four, her mother's death broke up this happiness and necessitated the departure of the family to Lisieux, Normandy. We come to know about her life henceforth through her own writing.

Therese finished her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul (Histoire d'une Ame)*, only a few months before her death when she was not even twenty-five years old. She spent fifteen years of her life in a devout Catholic household and the remaining nine years in the quiet atmosphere of a cloistered community of some twenty Carmelite nuns at Lisieux.

The *Story of a Soul* is a humble, joyful acknowledgement of God's mercy and love in her simple, uncomplicated life. Like the direct and lucid message of the Gospels, it can be the source of deep religious inspiration for those who read it with an open mind. Shortly after its first publication in 1898, one man candidly admitted: 'I have read this book three times already, and each time it has made me a better man.' This statement has been repeated in various ways by its many readers. *The Story of a Soul*, written in three parts, has been translated into 35 languages and has sold more than 100 million copies.

At the age of 14, Therese had a vision and wanted to be a nun. Pauline and Marie, her two sisters, had already become nuns. Therese's ambition was to love God with each 'atom' of her heart and make Him loved by all souls. But she was too small, too weak a child. How could she fulfil her vision? She believed that God who inspired in her that desire would surely help her find a way. She continued to pray to Him and could not spend even three minutes without His thought. For her, the one and only goal of life was to cultivate love for God.

It was 14 September 1894. Therese got

the answer she looked for so anxiously. Celine, her sister, joined the Carmels at Lisieux and Therese found in her baggage a diary full of beautiful quotations from the Old Testament. There she read: 'If one is too little, he or she comes to Me.' Therese felt God talk to her personally. She went on reading: 'As a mother caresses her baby, similarly I will console you, I will take you on My lap, balance you on My knees.' Therese, the little flower, was in seventh heaven! God is our Mother! God is our very own! We can even force our demands on Him! Being *toute petite* (very little) was then no problem for her. God who is our Father and Mother and inspires in us love and faith would come down surely to her and make her His instrument in spreading the 'Little Way' of spiritual childhood.

Therese continued her discovery and wrote it down scrupulously. Faith, love and total surrender to His will—these are the means which help us realize God and be near Him. The true beauty and charm of a person lies in his or her *saintete* (holiness). With this beacon of love and faith she led people along the path of divinity and bliss. God is grasped through ecstasy of love. When love awakes, the Lord, like a magnet, draws to Him the soul. So what is needed is absorption in Him, loving Him intensely. And the ideal relation should be one of mother and child. As Sri Ramakrishna said, 'I am the child, Thou art the Mother.... I am Thy instrument. I do as Thou makest me do.... not I, not I, but Thou, Thou.' Totally absorbed in Jesus when Therese was dying, she uttered: 'I am not dying, I enter into Life.' Twenty-eight years after her death, she was proclaimed Saint and later acknowledged as Doctor of the Church. Her message is still impelling, still powerful. She assures human beings: '*Qui a Jesus a tout*, The person who loves God has acquired everything.' Her *Story of a Soul* has become a spiritual classic. □

The Concept of Food

COL KULDIP CHAND KOHLI

Col Kohli from Dehradun has presented a systematic analysis of the concept of food, stressing the importance of its purity.

Physiologically, food is defined as assimilation of energy from the sun by plants and animals.¹ Ordinarily speaking, food is that which we consume through our mouth—to satiate our hunger, to supply nutrition, and to provide energy and vitality to the body so that it may function well. Food keeps the body going, bestows life, prevents illness, and cures disease. At the psychological level, it is food that affects the thought process, the outlook on life, and the growth and development of the intellect. In addition to this, there is a wider meaning to the term food which includes all our sensory intake—sunlight, air, and even medicines.

Lord Jesus speaks about the ideal of light eating and says, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'² Again, 'Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat,' he says.³ That is, we should not constantly fuss about the body's needs but eat to live just for the service of God, and not to satisfy the whims of our palate. We eat to live and not vice versa. Taste is only in the tongue and once the food has crossed the throat, it has no meaning to the tongue; all food becomes the same. Yet, it is necessary to know some ideas about food.

The well-known Sanskrit term for food is *annam*. This word comes from *ad*, to eat. The derivative meaning is, *adyate atti ca bhūtāni*. Sankara has given an altogether different in-

terpretation to the idea of food in his *Sādhana Pañcakam*. In the fourth verse there, he has compared hunger to a disease, and food to medicine. That is, (a) just as taking medicine is essential to cure a disease, we must cure the disease of hunger by eating; we must not abstain from taking food; (b) taking correct and suitable diet to allay our hunger is necessary even as we would take the right medicine to cure a particular disease; (c) the quantity of food we take must be such that it should satiate our hunger, as in the case of medicine: over-medication has its own harmful effect; and (d) we must not worry about the taste of food; we must consume it like we do medicine.

Importance of Food

The question of food has been discussed with meticulous detail in our scriptures. The Vedas have several prayers, addressed to various gods, seeking more food. One particular prayer (*sūkta*) is addressed to *pitu*, which means food (*pituṁ pālakaṁ annam*). In this prayer, the sage addresses food in this way: 'You are our great nourisher by the gift of such foods as consist of water and herbs; this will make our bodies strong.'⁴ There is a mantra in the *Atharva Veda* which says, 'Whatever you eat and drink, such as cereals and other agricultural produce, and milk, all this I make free from poisonous elements for you.'⁵ One more mantra of the same Veda says, 'The food articles which are got by churning and cooking, the pulp and kernel that strengthen the brain—I give you all these.

1. *Ādityād jāyate vṛṣṭiḥ vṛṣṭeḥ annam tato prajāḥ*.
—*Manu Smṛti*, 3.76.

2. *Matthew*, 4.4

3. *Ibid.*, 6.25

4. *R̥g Veda*, 1.187.8

5. *Atharva Veda*, 8.1.17.

May these be conducive to produce health and vitality in you.⁶ The Upanishads speak of food with great regard. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* gives the definition of food in this manner: 'Since living beings eat it, it is called food.'⁷ The *Chāndogya* says that 'water is the leader of food.'⁸ The same Upanishad also asserts that there is great importance of food, without which a person loses the power to see, hear, or think intelligently. Again, 'You eat food and see the pleasant. In such a lineage will be born the lustre of the knowledge of Brahman.'⁹ Sections 7 through 10 of the third chapter of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* speak about the greatness of food. It is said there that one must not speak ill of food, one must not waste it, one must grow foodgrains, vegetables, fruits, etc in abundance, and one must procure more and more food (*annam na nindyāt, annam na paricakṣita, annam bahu kurvita*). These are *vratas*, rules or vows. Such great rules are true for all times. The *Bhagavadgītā* speaks of food in this manner: '*annād bhavanti bhūtāni*; from food are born creatures.'¹⁰ One of the five sheaths of the body, the gross physical body is called the 'food sheath'—*annamaya kośa*. The *Bhāgavata*, the *Manu Smṛti*, and a host of other sacred scriptures speak about the importance of food. Everyone needs food for the sustenance of the body. Sri Ramakrishna has repeatedly stressed the point that people are dependent on food in the present age. Even a liberated soul is not exempt from consuming food. 'Even a realized person has to continue eating till he leaves his body,'¹¹ says the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*.

6. Ibid., 78.4.42.

7. *Adyate atti ca bhūtāni, tasmād annam taducyate iti*. —*Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 2.2.1.

8. *Āpa ācakṣate āsanāya*. —*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.8.3.

9. Ibid., see 6.7.1-6 and 5.15.2.

10. *Bhagavadgītā*, 3.14.

11. *Nārada Bhakti Sūtra*, 14.

Giving Food, a Great Act

The benefit of donating food is never exaggerated. All our scriptures are one voice about this. One of the greatest of gifts, which brings great merit specially to householders, is the gift food. The *Bodhāyana Dharma Sūtra* insists that giving food is a priceless measure which transcends all earthly qualities. So, it has to be done. In the *Mahābhārata*, Yudhishtira asks Sri Krishna the central theme of Bhishma's life. In reply, Sri Krishna says, 'The world, both animate and inanimate, is sustained by food. Life arises from food. O Yudhishtira, provide food, provide food, provide food.' The eminent text *Manu Smṛti* says, 'If one attains contentment, the one who donates food attains endless beatitude.'¹² The Koran says that nobody in your neighbourhood should go hungry. We should therefore share food with our neighbours. The system of *langar* in Sikh religion is an example of not only food-sharing, but also in bringing the high and the low together. It was the age-old custom in India that unless a guest ate at home, the host never touched food; and unless everyone at home ate, the mother would remain hungry.

Classification of Food

There are various classifications of food, both in our scriptures and in modern times. According to the *Gītā*, food can be *sāttvika*, *rājasika*, or *tāmasika*, based on the effect it produces on the consumer's mind.¹³ *Tāmasika* foods neglect the laws of hygiene, have a malignant effect on the body and the mind, cause lethargy, and dull the aspiration for spiritual growth. Included in this category are meat and stale, dirty, rotten food items.

The *rājasika* type induces action, promoting stimulation to the senses and the mind, and are addictive by nature. These include hot, spicy, pungent, salty and strongly fla-

12. *Vāridaḥ trptim āpnoti, sukham-akṣayam annadaḥ*. —*Manu Smṛti*, 4.229.

13. See *Gītā*, 17.8-10 and also a detailed discussion later on.

voured foods like onion, garlic as also flesh, alcoholic beverages and so on.

The *sāttvika* type of food promotes good health, vitality, longevity, a calm and cheerful disposition, inclination towards goodness and spiritual aspiration. Into this category are included sweets, fresh seasonal fruits, raw and cooked vegetables, wholegrains and legumes, fresh dairy products, nuts, honey, dates, and so on.

The food that we consume without any spiritual or religious association belongs to the ordinary type. That which is offered to deities and then partaken of is sacramental food (*prasāda*). There is one more variety of sacred food, and that is the one monastics acquire from begging (*bhikṣā*). This type of food is considered very pure. Among the several other classifications of food, one is the gross (containing bulk, fibre and very little nutrition which goes as waste product), the medium (normal nutritious food which forms blood and flesh) and the fine (inhaled oxygen, sunlight and inner life energy) which forms the mind. That which we partake of can also be divided into different groups according to the way we consume them: normal, wholesome solid food which we masticate, liquid diet which we drink, food that is licked, air, gaseous matter and others that are swallowed, some energy that is drawn through the skin, etc. The modern scientific method of dividing food into classes is this: proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and so on.

The Problem of Prohibited Food

There are certain foods which are to be avoided at all costs, like intoxicating drinks, harmful diet, etc. According to Ramanuja food becomes contaminated and hence despicable owing to three factors: by the very nature of food (*jāti doṣa*), like garlic, animal foods, chillies, alcohol, and so on; by its coming in contact with certain people, places, animals, etc (*āśraya doṣa*); and by its containing impurities (*nimitta doṣa*). Great care is to be taken, say our scriptures, in avoiding despi-

cable food. Except under great calamity, when one's very life is in danger, one should not go for prohibited food. When your very life is in danger, you may take food without discriminating, says the *Brahma Sūtra*: '(Only) when one's life is in jeopardy (is there) permission to take food without indiscrimination, because the *śruti* declares so.'¹⁴ Sankara quotes from Manu while commenting on another *sūtra*, 'One does not incur sin and will remain like a lotus leaf in water even though one partakes of any sort of food when one's life is in danger.'¹⁵ However, our scriptures do not prescribe intoxicating drinks. In the case of brahmins specially, the rules are very severe. While commenting on *sūtra* 3.4.30 of the *Brahma Sūtras*, Sankara says that a brahmin shall for ever avoid wine....The drunkard becomes a worm if he takes to intoxicating drinks.

The subject of flesh-eating has been rather controversial and there are opposing views in scriptures too about this. Though the Vedas instruct us not to kill, killing for the sake of sacrifices (and eating of such sacrificial flesh) is allowed. Of all the reasons against flesh-eating one of the important ones, and a scientific one too, is the harm it does to the physical system. Flesh-eating causes injury to the body and mind. Though meat-eating may be justified on several grounds, ethical and moral grounds, however, insist that a simple, vegetarian diet is the best. From the point of view of health also, it is assimilation that counts, and not the type of food that we take. The link between consumption of meat and cancer was presented by Prof Alan Boobis of the Royal Postgraduate Medical School in London at a meeting of Britain's Biochemical Society. He said:

We know from biochemical studies that the consumption of cooked red meat is associated with the development of cancer

14. *Sarvānnānumatiśca prāṇātyaye, taddarśanāt.*
—*Brahma Sūtra* 3.4.28

15. *Manu Smṛti*, 10.104.

of the bowels. The reasons for this association are not known, but it has been found that during the cooking process, the action of heat on the natural components of meat results in the formation of a group of compounds known as Heterocyclic Amines which can cause cell mutation. These compounds are toxic to DNA and have been shown to cause cancer in animals.'

The controversy about vegetarian and non-vegetarian types of food is ever alive. There are arguments for and against both types of food. Those who are vegetarians claim that killing animals for food is a heinous crime; meat kept for some time starts rotting and harmful toxins are produced even before it starts smelling bad; except for Eskimos and other races to whom no vegetarian food is available, no one else should go for it, and so on. Swami Vivekananda says, 'For him surely is a strict vegetarian diet whose one end is to lead solely a spiritual life.'¹⁶ Scriptures too are seen to prohibit eating flesh. The *Atharva Veda*, for example, says, 'O ye, who take delight in killing others, in spoiling others' happiness, you mean ones, may your weapons of killing revert and attack you. You are to eat them whose you are. ... Eat your own flesh.' There are opposite views also. There are ample instances of Rama, Krishna and other incarnations eating flesh. Swami Vivekananda points them out. He adds, '...he who has to steer the boat of his life with strenuous labour through constant life-and-death struggles and the competition of this world, must of necessity take meat. So long as there will be...the triumph of the strong over the weak, animal food is required....'¹⁷

The logic of the supporters of non-vegetarian diet is extended to milk also, but in the case of milk, the cow is not killed but it lives on happily. Milk is a complete and whole-

some food in itself and many are the references in our scriptures about this great nourisher. 'O God, be thou our great nourisher by such ingredients of food which are made up of cow's milk and its products, accompanied by preparations made from cereals like barley and other grams.'¹⁸

Food and Mind

Food and mind are intimately related, one affecting the other. The effects of food are not limited to the physique only but they also influence one's intellectual and mental faculties in the long run. Food can determine the state of our mind, our mood swings, and our behaviour in society. Conversely, the traits of a person who is cooking and handling the food can affect the purity of it and there are ample evidences to this effect. An angry cook adds a little anger, a selfish cook will dress the dishes with a little selfishness, a dirty cook spoils the food with dirt, and so on. That is, the character of the cook is always in the flavour of the diet, and this induces that trait in the partakers. Modern science also affirms these days that thought affects the behaviour and actions of a person. Hence it is important to prepare a meal with love, affection, care and with a sense of hygiene. Good food does not necessarily mean rich food: it is the food that a concerned mother cooks and serves to her dear children. The mother prepares dishes with great care, and with the idea that her children should grow and develop well. And a devoted mother adds her spiritual fervour into the food she cooks, thereby infusing spirituality into all those who eat it. That is the reason why we are generally told to avoid food cooked outside and to always prefer home-made things.

No incident explains the effect of food more clearly than the one concerning Guru Nanak and Bhai Lallo. Guru Nanak was invited to an ostentatious lunch hosted by the landlord of the village Bhago. The landlord had also invited all the villagers. But Guru

16. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama), Vol. 5, p. 485. [Hereafter *Complete Works*.]

17. Ibid.

18. *Rg Veda*, 2.26.5

Nanak declined to eat there and went to the lowly outcaste Lallo. To the angry landlord, he said, 'Your food is uneatable because it is served with arrogance and out of affluence. Lallo's food is divine because it is served with devotion and humility.'

Eating Sanctified Food

To eat after offering food to the gods is an act which frees us from the binding effects of the law of karma. Those who live and eat for themselves remain under the compulsion of the law of cause and effect, which leads to rebirths. 'The sinful ones who cook food for themselves only, verily eat sin.'¹⁹ It is the Hindu custom, and so also of other religions, to pray before eating, to offer food to God before eating. We should consume not just food but offered food (*prasāda*), and its noble effect on the body and mind can never be exaggerated. Anyone who 'enjoys what have been given by the gods without offering to them is certainly a thief (*stena eva saḥ*).'²⁰

Principles of Eating

Meal-time is a type of sacrifice (*yajña*). Before meals, we should wash our hands, preferably sit on the ground (ie, squat the Indian way) upon a seat, in a clean place. The dishes should be clean. One should first of all offer the food to God, pray to Him, and eat in silence. It is beautifully illustrated in the *Gītā*, 'Brahman is the ladle, oblation is Brahman, the offering is being poured by Brahman and into the fire of Brahman. Brahman alone is to be reached by him who has concentration on Brahman as the objective.'²¹ To eat as a sacrifice, to participate in a cosmic sacrifice that is going on, gives life a higher meaning, an upper turn, and a purpose. Our body, mind and soul will be greatly benefited by such eating. It is not just filling the stomach that is being done, it is a sacrifice that is going on. We must eat with a calm, composed mind. What we eat is as important as how we eat. Overeating is

criticized in our scriptures and by modern science. Control of the palate is the foremost discipline mentioned everywhere. The food that is consumed must be easily digestible, good, pure, and must be consumed with small amounts of liquid (water). Dry food may hurt our stomach. 'The food must be simple and taken several times [a day].... "He who eats too much cannot be a Yogi,"'²² says Swamiji. Too rich a food, vegetarian or non-vegetarian, with lots of fat and proteins can cause subtle brain damage, leading to a disorder called Gourmand Syndrome, according to some Swiss researchers.

Eating judiciously, carefully, with devotion, and with a composed mind will undoubtedly build one's body. Tailoring our food according to age, state of health and so on are naturally beneficial.

Dieting and Fasting

There are theories and theories about dieting and fasting. According to religious directions, fasting occasionally is good. It gives the much-needed rest to the digestive system; it helps in strengthening and purifying the body and mind; it generates kindness and helps increase in devotion; the community too is benefited, though to a small extent. However, our cautious scriptures always advise moderation. For example, the *Gītā* says that yoga becomes the destroyer of sorrow of one whose eating and movements are regulated.²³

Thus, there are various ideas about food, but we conclude by summarizing what was stated in this article: (a) food should be obtained by honest means and from pure sources; (b) it should be cooked and served with love and affection, and with a mind to cleanliness; (c) it should be simple, nutritious, frugal and good; (d) one must avoid prohibited food; (e) one must eat to live a higher life.

19. *Gītā*, 3.13.

20. *Gītā*, 3.12.

21. *Gītā*, 4.24.

22. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 518.

23. *Gītā*, 6.17.

Ethics and Values: A Vedantic Perspective

PROF V. KUMAR MURTY

This perceptive article is based on a talk given in 1997 at a seminar on 'Ethics and Values' held at the Vedanta Society of Toronto. The author is a professor of mathematics at the University of Toronto, Canada.

Introduction

The question of values, ethics and morals is a global and human concern. We find ourselves in a situation where, as individuals, we unanimously give assent to the importance of morality, values and ethics. We acknowledge the need for a value-oriented education and for ethically-minded business. But as institutions, we find ourselves paralyzed. In the field of education, any attempt at introducing values, however reasonable it may sound, is met by a chorus of opposition by various groups. For decades, policy makers have insisted that the secular basis of education precludes the teaching of values, a subject which is too close to religion. And Nobel Prize-winning economists have insisted that the one and only responsibility of business is to make profits.

Just steps away from the next millennium, it is appropriate to ask whether these opinions are justified and whether they are acceptable in the present social environment. Does business have a social responsibility? Should education include the imparting of values? In this essay, we shall explore a Vedantic perspective on the meaning of ethics and values and some possible answers to these questions.

To orient ourselves, a few preliminary observations will be useful. Firstly, we should realize that we are not the first to raise these questions nor will we be the last. Each age has to examine these issues anew. It is unlikely if there ever was a period of human history in which the practice of ethics and values did not offer a challenge. It may be that time has

magnified the circumstances, but fundamentally they have not been altered. Today, we have to contend with larger and more diverse populations whereas a previous age had to deal with smaller communities. Today, we have to deal with markets of billions and trillions of dollars instead of millions.

Secondly, there are no easy answers. In our frustration, we may point to many things—industrialism, computers, the stock market, technology—as the cause of our problems. It is tempting (and even fashionable) to condemn our age as particularly decadent. It is tempting to speak of the past as a golden age. However, as the Sanskrit proverb goes, *dūrataḥ parvato ramyaḥ*—the distant mountains seem very smooth. Ethical and moral problems are caused by human beings and not by social institutions. And though the outer garb may have changed, it is not at all clear that basic human nature has changed.

Thirdly, the challenge has been, and will always be, fundamentally a personal one. It is the mindset, the perception, the understanding of the people behind social institutions which will determine the nature of those institutions.

What are Ethics and Values?

Both ethics and values are rooted in morality. The word *moral* comes from *mores*, which the dictionary defines as relating to, dealing with, or capable of making the distinction between right and wrong in conduct. To be moral implies conformity with the generally accepted standards of goodness or

rightness in conduct or character. The word *ethical* originates from the Greek word *ethikos* and it implies conformity with an elaborated ideal code of moral principles.

All these definitions involve undefined or ambiguous terms. What do we mean by 'generally accepted'? And is one being immoral if one follows one's own convictions? To be ethical, does one have to surrender one's individual freedom to choose the best course of action? We also know that what is regarded as moral at one time in one country may be regarded as quite immoral at another time in another country. Thus, the attempt to give a definition that is universally applicable seems to raise many conundrums. We seem to have no fixed standard of judgement and so there is always a confusion of ethics, morals and values.

There is an intuitive feeling that morality and ethics are not to be defined by the convenience of the moment. The *form* in which the values are practised may change, but in their essence, they ought to be based on timeless and universal principles.

It is not unreasonable that both the individual and society will have to formulate ethics in the form of a system of rules and prescriptions. That is a practical consideration. It is never perfect. But because it is never perfect, we need not eschew it at the outset. Rather, we must keep our mind open for the system to evolve. This evolution will be made smoother if we can develop an ethical culture. This does not consist of prescriptions, but a way of looking at life, at ourselves and at society.

Ethics is essentially a social phenomenon. It manifests as a result of the interaction between the individual and society, or between two individuals, or between two beings, or between an individual and its environment.¹ In any such interaction, there are two opposing forces. One is the freedom of the being, and the other is the curtailing of

that freedom in recognition of the freedom of the other being. I heard the following story from Swami Sarvagatananda, head of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Massachusetts in Boston. A man was walking on a beach twirling his cane. Another man was walking behind him and the cane was coming dangerously close to his nose. So he said, 'Mister, stop twirling your cane.' The first man replied, 'This is a free beach. I can do as I like.' To this, the second said, 'Your freedom ends where my nose begins!' As soon as I see the other, my freedom is curtailed to a certain extent.

Certain philosophical and spiritual principles may guide us in dealing with these opposing forces. These principles are timeless and do not depend on the particular time or structure of society. In order for these principles to be of practical use, one needs an interpretation to the situation at hand. It is these interpretations that we normally label as ethics and values. But any such interpretation is necessarily dated and limited.

That is why we must recognize that though the source is from ethical principles, in practice, ethics and values are an evolving form of guidance for the interactions between two beings or between an individual and society. They evolve even as the individual and society evolve. In fact, if followed, they facili-

ganathananda in his book *Human Being in Depth: A Scientific Approach to Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 34, explains the meaning of this word: '*Dharma*, as the principle of integration between one individual and another in society, does not mean religion in the sense of creed, doctrine, or ritual, nor any scheme of otherworldly salvation. ... There is an integrating principle that makes for the evolution of a dynamic and expansive personality out of a static individuality and that holds its members together. That principle is *dharma*. *Dharma* indicates that which holds us together. It is an integrative force within society.'

1. In Sanskrit, the word which roughly corresponds to ethics is *dharma*. Swami Ran-

tate and direct this evolution.

The ethical problem can be divided into three phases: 1) The formulation of a set of ethical principles, at a philosophical or spiritual level; 2) An algorithm (that is, a step by step procedure) which in any given situation, helps us to decide what is right and what is wrong; 3) The ability to act based on this information. In this essay, we shall discuss each of these phases, especially with a view to outlining the perspective of Vedanta.

Religion and Ethics

After centuries of oppression by organized religion, the Europeans who settled in North America decided to organize themselves on the basis of secular principles. This did not come without a fight. The earliest states in New England, for example Massachusetts and Rhode Island, were originally Church states. It was reformers like Thomas Jefferson who had the courage and practical wisdom to chart a new course. The Christianity from which they were escaping imposed a set of values based on fear of Divine retribution. Even now, when one visits the chapels in northern Spain, for example, which until five centuries ago represented the border between Christian and Muslim spheres of influence in Europe, the overwhelming emotion that one feels is not one of sanctity, but of fear. 'Be good, or else...' was the basis of ethics and values. This kind of morality is as repugnant today as it was at that time to anyone who thinks of himself or herself as a free individual with a right to determine his or her own future. It is repugnant not so much for its assertions, as for its inflexibility and its claims to infallibility.

However, we maintain that morality does not require theological speculations. It does not depend on entities such as God, soul, heaven, or hell. As Swami Satprakashananda says, it 'is not imposed upon us by society,... nor is it infused into us by prescriptions and prohibitions' by the Church. It cannot be grafted onto us by the State. Morality, ethics

and values deal with the here and now, with this tangible world of ours, with human interests and concerns, and their source is in the very constitution of the human being.² They make themselves known to us through the voice of conscience.

What makes this latent source more manifest, and this inner voice more audible? It is the thirst to understand the nature of reality, and to answer fundamental questions about the meaning of life. These are as fuel to the engine of ethics, and make it easier to define and to practise. Moral life not only becomes smoother and more natural, but also more secure and steady, as the mind begins to grasp the reality of something far more valuable than the world revealed by the senses.

If humanity were satisfied with sensory knowledge, we should still think that the sun rotates around the earth and that venturing too far out in the ocean, we will fall off the edge. More than a millennium before the space programme gave us pictures of the 'pale blue dot' we call our home, ancient thinkers such as Eratosthenes determined that the world must be round by measuring varying lengths of shadows which objects cast at different places. This is an example of thought revealing truth which is not sensory, but which nevertheless engages the senses in its confirmation.

As Swami Ashokananda says, 'The world of values has its centre in our own self-consciousness.' Change that, and there will be a corresponding change in our perception of values.³ It is the confusion in the individual, a lack of sufficient examination of what life means, that blurs one's vision and

2. Swami Satprakashananda, *Ethics and Religion* (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 1948), p. 18.

3. Swami Ashokananda, 'The Dream of a New Perfection' in *Prabuddha Bharata* (March 1929). Reprinted in *A Call to the Eternal* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1995), p. 114.

thought.

Vedanta says that the deepest truths, the truths that are the basis of ethics and values, arise from within ourselves. They arise from a level of our being which is deeper than the intellect even, and which perhaps can only be described as life itself.

Mutual Self-interest

In running away from religious morality, one comes to the perspective which says 'be ethical because we depend on each other.' Our mutual self-interest will be better served if we agree that I will not cheat you and you will not cheat me. This is a little better, but the problem is that it depends on both of us being of equal strength. The moment I am stronger than you, I find no common interest and no reason for being ethical towards you.

The ethics that is based on mutual consideration of interests is based on ego, distinctiveness and selfishness. These are the same factors that are the causes of conflict, whether it be between individuals, businesses or nations.

The popularity of the mutual self-interest theory may be related to the tremendous success of science and technology. It has made us bow down in reverence to the material world as all that exists. The power and convenience that science has made available to society during the last few centuries are very impressive indeed. But can the scientific approach give us values?

Science and Human Values

The pursuit of science is based on the search for truth, and this cannot be practised without ethics. Jacob Bronowski writes:

We can practise science only if we value the truth.... What the critics are anxious to say...is that the scientific civilization in which we live is not taught any values by the facts that science finds, by the machines that it builds, and even by the visions that it opens.... But, of course, although the facts do not supply such an

injunction or end, the *activity* of science does. The activity of science is committed to truth as an end in itself.⁴

The activity of science demands the value of truth. Of course, we should acknowledge that one who practises science does not often bring the scientific demand for truth into the rest of his or her life, especially into psychosocial relationships. It is analogous to the unholy behaviour often noticed amongst followers of organized religions.

However, we should probe this word *truth* a little bit so that we do not have a naive concept. We know that in all scientific descriptions, there is a certain coarseness, an 'experimental error', which is allowed. The scientist has to decide what degree of coarseness is allowable. This decision is one of judgement, and brings the human being into the picture. The practice of science is not for robots, but for human beings. The findings of science are neutral, but the activity of science is not.

Science teaches us how to go about the search for truth. It outlines an *empirical* process of experimentation, observation and conclusion. Conclusions which do not tally with facts revealed by further experimentation are rejected, or at the very least, are very suspect. The scientific revolution was, and is, not about certain discoveries about the physical world, but the imparting of a scientific bent to our culture, society and civilization.

In addition to placing the highest value on truth, science teaches us something else. In the search for truth, we must allow for change and evolution. A society which believes that it has found *the* truth imposes it on its population and moreover, resists all change. Such a society stagnates and eventually dies. Swami Vivekananda says:

Truth does not pay homage to any society, ancient or modern. Society has to pay

4. Jacob Bronowski, 'The Values of Science' in *A Sense of the Future* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977), pp. 212-13.

homage to truth or die.⁵

Values are a mechanism for society to grow and evolve. In propounding the theory of evolution—that species change—Darwin offered two forces which act to bring about this change, namely survival of the fittest and natural selection. He advised caution in applying these concepts to the human situation, but the popular attempt has been to apply it with a vengeance. Where do values fit into this model of evolution?

Since Darwin's time evolutionary science has come a long way, and in particular, it is being recognized that at the human level, some new forces are operating. One example is what Julian Huxley referred to as *psychosocial selection*. This refers not to biological growth, but to an organization of ideas, beliefs and the consequent behaviour as expressed in social and cultural patterns. In regard to human evolution, human values must be given a place among the criteria for human progress and they can perhaps be fitted into a process such as psychosocial selection.

It is also to be noted that the concessions which many evolutionary scientists are making today about the speciality of human evolution, namely that it might involve factors other than natural selection and survival of the fittest, may in fact have to be made with respect to non-human evolution as well. Examples of sacrifice at the animal level exist in abundance, as do sacrifice and sharing between species.

The search for truth, and the recognition that society must change with the truth thus far discovered, spawns some social values. What are these values? There must be a safeguard for independence of mind and originality, for dissent and for freedom. These are what fuel the engine of change in society. There must also be values which resist change, such as tolerance and acceptance of

others who hold different opinions. Again science teaches us that we may disagree with people without considering them to be wicked or evil. These are the human values that the activity of science teaches us.

The public perception of science, however, is quite different from the way we have painted it. There is a view that science is a barren wasteland of inhuman facts. The reason for this perception is that we are too far removed from the *activity* of science. The particular scientific disciplines such as physics and chemistry use the language of mathematics to express themselves. They are thus forces to quantify everything. This aspect has also reached society through the scientific revolution and, we believe, has had the effect of dehumanizing us to some extent. Attempts are made to measure everything. For example, economists are busy tabulating something called the 'happy quotient' and the 'feel good factor' as part of the gross national product. Those who are involved in popular science have to make efforts that though the language of science is quantitative, the activity of science is not. It is a very human activity and one from which we can derive some social values.

Ethics and Yoga

In the realm of philosophy and spirituality, what might be described as a scientific revolution took place in ancient times in the Indian subcontinent. The result was Vedanta. Truth was approached empirically. The field of experimentation was substantially enlarged from the physical universe to the mental universe and beyond. Tools had to be fashioned that could conduct experiments and make observations in these subtler realms.

Values such as truth and non-violence discussed by Patanjali, the author of the *Yoga Sūtras*, were seen as means by which the body and mind could be strengthened and made more suitable for the search for truth. The 9th century philosopher and teacher Sankaracharya wrote in one of his master-

5. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 2, p. 84. [Hereafter *Complete Works*.]

pieces, the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, that where the search for truth is not a priority, virtue is a mere appearance, like a mirage in the desert.⁶ Thus in this perspective, values are seen as a means by which the tools for observation can be made and a serious search for truth undertaken.

The teachers of yoga tell us that the solution of ethical conundrums is to be found within ourselves. We have only to learn to look within and listen to our own inner being. Action is but the tip of the iceberg. It is the manifestation of a process that is going on within. The causes of action are within the mind. If we want to affect action, it is there that we must look. Swami Vivekananda says:

The great error in all ethical systems, without exception, has been the failure of teaching the means by which man could refrain from doing evil. All the systems of ethics teach, 'Do not steal!' Very good; but why does a man steal? Because all stealing, robbing, and other evil actions, as a rule, have become automatic. The systematic robber, thief, liar, unjust man and woman, are all these in spite of themselves! It is really a tremendous psychological problem. We should look upon man in the most charitable light. It is not so easy to be good. What are you but mere machines until you are free? Should you be proud because you are good? Certainly not. You are good because you cannot help it. Another is bad because he cannot help it. If you were in his position, who knows what you would have been. The woman in the street, or the thief in the jail, is the Christ that is being sacrificed that you may be a good man. Such is the law of balance. All the thieves and the murderers, all the unjust, the weakest, the wickedest, the devils, they are all my Christ!

The evil deed is, no doubt, on the conscious plane; but the cause which pro-

duced the evil deed was far beyond in the realms of the unconscious, unseen, and therefore more potent.⁷

The whole process of yoga as explained by Patanjali is aimed at reaching within and examining the internal causes that are the sources of our actions.

Freedom and Unselfishness

In our view, the question of ethics only arises in a social context. It has essentially to do with our dealings with others, whether this happens to be other human beings, or animals, or our environment. There is a tension arising from the apparently opposing forces of the collective well-being and the freedom of the individual.

However, from a Vedantic perspective, there is actually no opposition between collective well-being and the well-being of the individual. The Vedantic perspective of the 'oneness of existence' means that consciousness is one, that there is no 'other'. This means that at a deep and fundamental level, the freedom of the individual is the freedom of society. Naturally, conviction or even intellectual awareness of this idea will temper one's behaviour. Whatever one does to another, one is doing to oneself. We would like to say that ethics is behaviour which is generally based on this principle. 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'

We feel that the only philosophical principle on which a lasting and meaningful theory of ethics and ethical practices can be built is that of the oneness of existence. Schopenhauer, in his monograph *On the Basis of Morality* writes:⁸

My true inner being exists in every living thing as directly as it makes itself known in my self-consciousness only to me. In Sanskrit, *tat tvam asi* (this art thou) is the

6. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), verse 31, p. 11.

7. *Complete Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 33-34.

8. Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1995), p. 210. In this essay, written in 1839, Schopenhauer tries to put forward the

formula, the standing expression, for this knowledge. It is this that bursts forth as *compassion* on which all genuine, ie disinterested, virtue therefore depends, and whose real expression is every good deed. In the last resort, it is this knowledge to which every appeal to gentleness, leniency, loving-kindness, and mercy instead of justice, is directed.

Individual life is conceived as an organic part of the universal life. We are all interrelated and interdependent. Recognition or acknowledgement of this interrelationship is the basis of morality and ethics according to Schopenhauer.

We had dismissed common interest as a basis for ethics because it is too fragile, because it depends on our changing interests. But with this philosophical principle of the oneness of existence, we rediscover it at a deeper and more fundamental level. Paul Deussen writes:

The Gospels fix quite correctly as the highest law of morality: 'Love your neighbour as yourselves'. But why should I do so, since by the order of nature, I feel pain and pleasure only in myself, not in my neighbour? The answer...is in the great formula 'tat tvam asi', which gives in three words metaphysics and morals together. You shall love your neighbour as yourselves—because, you are your neighbour, and mere illusion makes you believe that your neighbour is something different from yourselves.⁹

No individual, no community or society, no country is fully self-contained. It is only a part of the whole. And each part affects the other.

idea that compassion is the basis of morality. In the final chapter, he discusses the metaphysical foundation of this in the above terms, namely the oneness of existence. He explains that this idea '...is the main and fundamental teaching of the oldest books in the world, the sacred Vedas...[and] in the Upanishads. There we find this great teaching on almost every page.'

Vivekananda reiterates:

This expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality.¹⁰

On the other hand, in the realization of the oneness of existence, we should not and cannot forget the individual. The practice of ethics is not to lose the individual in the 'greater good', but to recognize an underlying unity. Vivekananda explains:

The work of ethics has been, and will be in the future, not the destruction of variation and the establishment of sameness in the external world—which is impossible for it would bring death and annihilation—but to recognise the unity in spite of all these variations....¹¹

According to Vedanta, the goal of all nature is freedom, and freedom is to be attained only by perfect unselfishness. Vivekananda concludes that the only definition that can be given of morality, then, is this: that which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral.¹²

The Need for an Ethical Culture

On the need for an 'ethical culture', Einstein writes:

...the clearing away of obstacles does not by itself lead to an ennoblement of social and

9. Paul Deussen, 'On the Philosophy of the Vedanta in its Relations to Occidental Metaphysics', appendix to *Outlines of Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi: Ess Ess Publications, 1976), p. 63. This appendix is based on a talk given by Deussen in Bombay in 1893 to the Royal Asiatic Society. He concludes the talk by saying (p. 65): 'And so the Vedanta, in its pure and unfalsified form, is the strongest support of pure morality, is the greatest consolation in the sufferings of life and death—Indians, keep to it!' Reading this a century later, we might add, 'O world, keep to it!'

10. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 389.

11. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 436.

12. *Complete Works*, Vol. 1, p. 110.

individual life. For along with this negative result, a positive aspiration and effort for an ethical-moral configuration of our common life is of overriding importance [author's italics]. Here no science can save us. I believe, indeed, that overemphasis on the purely intellectual attitude, often directed solely to the practical and factual, in our education, has led directly to the impairment of ethical values. I am not thinking so much of the dangers with which technical progress has directly confronted mankind, as to the stifling of mutual human considerations by a 'matter-of-fact' habit of thought which has come to lie like a killing frost upon human relations.

Fulfilment on the moral and aesthetic side is a goal which lies closer to the preoccupations of art than it does to those of science. Of course, *understanding* of our fellow-beings is important. But this understanding becomes fruitful only when it is sustained by sympathetic feeling in joy and in sorrow. The cultivation of this most important spring of moral action is that which is left of religion when it has been purified of the elements of superstition. In this sense, religion forms an important part of education, where it receives far too little consideration, and that little is not sufficiently systematic.

The frightful dilemma of the political world situation has much to do with this sin of omission on the part of our civilization. Without 'ethical culture' there is no salvation for humanity.¹³

What is 'ethical culture' and how do we bring it about? It is a consciousness of ethics which colours our perspective. It is not any particular prescription, but an awareness of ethics as an issue and a respect for (and perhaps even a desire for) ethical behaviour. Like

all other aspects of culture, it has to be cultivated by exposing oneself to it.

As society now adores money and power, it will have to begin to adore virtue. It will have to adore compassion and unselfishness, and a respect for life in all its diverse manifestations. This is actually not hard to do, because as individuals, we instinctively admire such qualities.

One of the attitudinal shifts which will make ethical culture more likely is for us to reconsider what we mean by 'achievement' or 'success'. Society lauds a person who has risen to the top by ruthlessly cutting out the competition. But in an ethical culture, we may see living a decent life as the greatest achievement. In sports, whereas we shower gold on the one who runs in 50.006 seconds and completely ignore the one who runs in 50.007 seconds, perhaps we should look again at the way in which recognition is given.

We hasten to add that we are not advocating here an abolition of competition. Competition does have a role to play. To some extent, it stimulates the striving for excellence. However, it may not be the most efficient way of bringing out excellence. Swami Vivekananda compares competition to people trying to leave a theatre in which there is a fire. In the panic to get out quickly, people are crushed and even killed. Because of this frenzy, perhaps only a fraction of the total number are actually able to escape. On the other hand, an orderly and disciplined exit might have enabled many more people to escape to safety. We say that competition brings out excellence. Perhaps we can do this more efficiently and in greater numbers without pitting one person against the other.

Similar remarks could be made about our approach to education, especially as it relates to testing and evaluation. A grade of 51% and one of 49% can have drastically different consequences. What has brought us to this kind of system? Partly, it has to do with the numbers of children involved.

Let us look at our cities. Huge numbers

13. Albert Einstein, 'The Need for Ethical Culture' (letter to the Ethical Culture Society, New York, 1951). See *Ideas and Opinions* (New York: Crown Publishers Inc, 1982), pp. 53-54.

of people are living and working in close proximity to one another. Why is it so? For efficiency of administration and commerce. But what does it do to ethics and values? What is the difference between a city or a small community or village? In the latter, people know each other, either directly or indirectly through a friend or a neighbour. There is an interconnectedness, and this breeds a sense of collective responsibility. Surely this tempers people's behaviour. It need hardly be argued that there is a dehumanizing effect when one is lost in a crowd of unfamiliar people.

And what do we mean by efficiency? The centralized administration of a large group is efficient only in that it reduces the individuals to numerical data. The tyranny of reducing everything to quantitative considerations is what Einstein is referring to as 'a killing frost upon human relations.'

We believe that the ethical culture which Einstein speaks of is possible only if on the one hand we strengthen communities and community life, and on the other, encourage individuals to look within themselves for answers. Our inner voice is capable of resolving ethical conundrums in a way that no system can. For this, we have to cultivate a habit of listening to our conscience.

Life is an adventure if we allow it to be. But out of fear and insecurity, we grope for systems and prescriptions to tell us how to behave and how to think. There is nothing wrong in prescriptions or systems as long as we realize their tentative nature and as long as we are willing to weigh them against our own inner voice. We are not robots or automatons that our life can be dictated to by a system. Systems can help in offering advice and suggestions. But we must be the final arbiters in deciding what is right and what is wrong, what is ethical and what is not. To surrender our freedom to decide is to dehumanize ourselves.

Teaching Values in Schools

Many of the difficulties involved in teaching values in schools are rooted in our trying to give answers or prescriptions. Children are notorious for asking difficult questions. Why not return the favour?

Of course, we realize that to just raise questions without offering guidance is somewhat irresponsible. But the fact is that we do not have the answers. At best, we have a history of trying to find answers, of groping in the dark for what is really right and acceptable, of where we draw the line between individual freedom and social responsibility. Why not put *that* in front of the children.

In fact, for more than forty years, Swami Sarvagatananda has been suggesting that we should make a compilation of some of the greatest exemplars of striving for ethical perfection. His idea is to prepare books on the life and teachings of these great thinkers of the world, and use them in schools and invite an examination and discussion. This is a way of raising the questions *and* providing some guidance towards their examination.

Of course, some will object to this and say that we have already made a judgement by the choice of people whose lives we present. We have also made a judgement by the way we present the lives. That is true. But this is a tautologous statement. Everything we do presupposes a judgement of some kind. That is an inherent defect in action. There is nothing wrong in making a judgement as long as one is aware that it is temporary, as long as one's mind is open to change when there is new evidence.

We know that the greatest teaching is by example. No amount of preaching can equal a little practise. We may be woefully aware of our own limitations in trying to practise ethics and values. But then we should have faith in the inherent goodness of the human being that it will be able to detect truth when it sees it, whether it is able to express it or not. So let us go to those whom we consider to be the best exemplars of this. Let us raise the ques-

tions through the lives of the great exemplars, and let the children evolve their own concepts of ethics and values. This may be the only acceptable and effective way of proceeding.

We said above that judgements and opinions are acceptable, as long as we reserve for ourselves the right to change them in the light of new evidence. That openness to change is what science, or the scientific attitude, can contribute to the subject. On the other hand, science as it is practised suffers from the defect that in attempting to be precise, it imposes a quantitative structure on everything. But human values cannot be quantified. As we said before, the philosophical underpinnings come from the principle of the oneness of existence. It is therefore also necessary to develop the artistic impulse through the cultivation of music and art. This gives an appreciation of wholeness.

Profits and Social Responsibility

Public policy and the policy of business cannot afford to ignore the questions of ethics. Indeed, there is a school of economic thought which holds that the very survival of our market system depends on social responsibility. In the inaugural Davey lecture, delivered at Victoria University, the veteran economist John Kenneth Galbraith emphasized this point. He said:

The survival and acceptance of the modern market system is, in large measure, the accomplishment of the socially concerned. It would not have so survived had it not been for our successful civilizing efforts. Capitalism in its original form was an insufferably cruel thing. Only with trade unions, the protection of workers and workers' rights, pensions for the old, compensation for the unemployed, public health care, lower-cost housing, a safety net however imperfect for the unfortunate and the deprived, and public action to mitigate capitalism's commitment to boom and slump, did the market system become socially and politically acceptable. ... We,

the socially concerned, are the custodians of the political tradition and action that saved classical capitalism from itself.¹⁴

Of course, this kind of thinking has never been universally accepted. In his classic textbook *The Wealth of Nations*, a book which is standard material for Economics 100 in many parts of the world, Adam Smith put forward the theory of the 'invisible hand'. He said:

Every individual endeavours to employ his capital so that its produce may be of greatest value. He generally neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. He intends only his own security, only his own gain. And he is in this led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was not part of his intention. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.

This philosophy has been embraced by business as an endorsement of a policy which puts profits above all else. This has been advocated by many notable economists, including Nobel laureate Milton Friedman, who wrote an article in *The New York Times Magazine* with the title 'The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits'.

However, in the two and a quarter centuries since Adam Smith wrote the above words, the invisible hand is pointing more decidedly towards explicit social responsibility. In a recent book, Charles Garfield writes: ...social problems are inevitably making their impact felt within the corporation. An uneducated populace does not become suddenly literate upon entering the workplace. As social and environmental problems steadily erode productivity and threaten American competitiveness, corporate executives are beginning to rethink

14. 'Saving Capitalism from Itself', excerpt from the inaugural Senator Keith Davey lecture delivered on 9 January 1997 and reprinted in the University of Toronto *Bulletin*.

the notion that business needs to be concerned only with shareholder profits.¹⁵

There has been tremendous change in the attitude and thinking of business in the 90s. The paradigm of the corporation has shifted, at least a little, from that of a powerful machine to one of a living organism in which people are the essential components. Profits are important, but they appear in more forms than just a monetary return.

According to Garfield,¹⁶ the three E's of business today are ethics, environment and education. It represents a drastic rethinking of the philosophy espoused by Adam Smith. Concern about social well-being is no longer 'charity' but something which is crucial to the survival of the company. The mutual interdependence, the awareness that the company is one part of a multifaceted society in which each part supports and depends on another, is coming forcefully and graphically to the forefront. To those who still insist on hanging on to the old views of a company which need not be concerned with anything other than its own profits, Mark Vermilion of Sun Microsystems says:

I would ask them to conduct their business then without the use of public roads, without the use of public utilities. I would ask them to conduct their business without the use of a workforce that was educated largely on public funds. I would ask them to conduct their business without the protection of the government in terms of interstate and international trade, without the protection of armed services for the protection of the country. I would basi-

cally say, 'If you think you are separate from society, then really do try to conduct your business in isolation, and see how far you get.'¹⁷

Socially responsible companies produce goodwill and the support of the community and the society in which they operate. If 'goodwill' and 'support' are not important, then why do companies spend so much money on advertising? Surely, other things being equal, one is more likely to buy from a company which shows itself to care for the community. Secondly, such a company is more likely to attract a higher quality of work force. Asking talented and creative persons to sell their souls in order to work for a company is not likely to bring the best to anyone's doors. Social responsibility is profitable for the company from the point of view of the consumer, as well as the talent that it attracts.

Conclusion

We believe that ethics and values cannot be discussed without a spiritual dimension. This dimension is difficult to reach through organized religion, which normally embeds it in some theological belief system. Vedanta offers this dimension without the encumbrance of any particular dogma. This is not to say that Vedanta underrates any belief system. Rather it values them all. But, as there is so much divergence at that level, it is best left to individuals to contend with. Vedanta offers the principles which are common to all of these systems, and especially the oneness of existence and the paramount importance of the living being. It is felt that these are the basis of ethics and values. □

15. Charles Garfield, *Second to None* (Homewood: Business One Irwin, 1992), p. 317.

16. *Ibid.*, Chapter 9.

17. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 316.

O my God, let me be nothing to myself and to the world; let me be a mere instrument for your amusement; let me be the playball of the Infant Jesus. My God, let me seek nothing else and find nothing else but Thee. Turn all the joys of the world into bitterness; let me forget myself to remember but Thee. Let me become a martyr in soul or body or in both. My supreme desire is to die of Love.

—St Therese of Lisieux



Doggedness

'Good news!' the young monk almost shouted. Dogen displayed no interest but smiled sadly. 'Really it is good news. We shall have a new abbot,' the monk added eagerly. Seeing no joy in his friend's face, the monk was pained. 'Dogen, I have seen you since long. Not one day have you expressed joy. In fact, you haven't expressed yourself at all. You are always sad. What is the problem? I shall not leave you in peace today if you don't tell me all about yourself.' Dogen tried to brush his friend aside, but the monk was stubborn. Seeing no way out, Dogen took him for a walk. In the otherwise silent jungle, there was only the sound of dry leaves as they walked on them. The dry memories of Dogen's mind were being stirred now and the painful story of the young man was being revealed.

Mt Hiei! The very name had thrilled the young boy. He had heard about its glory since childhood. He belonged to a royal lineage. His ancestor was an emperor, and his mother's close relative was a Fujiwara prime minister. Dogen was highly educated: he learnt Chinese, studied several scriptures and mastered several arts. His able body, keen intelligence and noble conduct had made the elders decide to make him the future prime minister. Learning had not only entered Dogen's brain but his heart too. He had seen the vanity of the world thoroughly. Dogen, like Gautama Siddhartha, was ready to quit the world. At night the young lad left his home for good. His destination was some Buddhist monastery. Of all the monasteries, those on Mt Hiei near Kyoto fascinated him most. He walked. Days of hard struggle ultimately led him to Mt Hiei.

Splendid monasteries! Their roofs touched the sky, as it were. Hundreds of monks lived there. All this naturally appealed to the young mind. Dogen entered a monastery. His only aim was to seek refuge from worldliness and to know the Truth. He desperately wanted a true teacher. The search began. He himself struggled silently in his heart to practise what he had read. But books are no living examples.

Days of stay at the monastery proved futile. The royal blood easily saw through the pomp and glory of the monastery and of those around: only intellectual excellence but nothing of the glowing life. He searched and searched for a great soul. Not one was in sight. Routine life, studies, and luxury—these were all that was found in the monasteries. Where was the living Buddha? In anguish, Dogen wondered, 'I thought the monastery would have a few Buddhas, for the scriptures teach that we are all born Buddhas. But not one person is seen who looks like a Buddha.'

One morning, the thoroughly disappointed Dogen bade goodbye to Mt Hiei. Hunger for Truth piercing his heart, as it were, he walked to the lake Biwa near which was Miidera, another historic Buddhist centre. He stayed here for about one or two years. The same vainglory was evident here also. Given to lavishness and pageantry, the essentials were forgotten by the monks there. In utter dejection, Dogen decided to go to Eisai, the pioneer of Zen Buddhism in Japan. Unfortunately for him, soon after he reached there, Eisai gave up his body. The only way left for him was to follow in the footsteps of Eisai. He decided to walk over to China.

The strenuous, hazardous journey to China was a manifestation of Dogen's deter-

mination to find out the Truth. He could return home any moment to accept the prime-ministership that awaited him. No, that was not to be. Days of Herculean effort led him to the T'ien-t'ung monastery in which Eisai had attained enlightenment. There were wonderful monks there, but to satisfy Dogen's hunger for Truth was not given to them. The young man stayed in the monastery for two long years and struggled hard. Yet the heart was not soothed. From the T'ien-t'ung monastery, he went to several others, but his true spiritual teacher was not there.

Dogen's search took him to one such monastery. He was welcomed with warmth. 'My prayers might have been heard finally,' thought Dogen. Soon, however, he was to be overcome by disgust. An envoy of the head of that monastery spoke to Dogen, 'Young man, you are brilliant and talented and strong. Our master wants you to be here.' Dogen nodded. 'Our master says you can even become our master instead of him,' said the envoy. Dogen was shocked. 'How can that be possible?' 'Oh, come on!' said the envoy, 'How much money do you have? Our master says that if you can pay him a few thousands, you can well sit on his chair.' That was it. Abbothood for money! Things had come to such a pass. That very day Dogen quit the monastery.

Dogen had enough of monasteries. He decided to go back. After years of inhuman struggle, he had come to this conclusion: there is no living Buddha in the world; it is all false. On his way back, he again halted at the T'ien-t'uan monastery. It was here that the monk told him of the change of abbot.

The monk who listened to Dogen's story was overwhelmed; he understood that a magnificent man walked beside him. 'Dogen, you are a superb person. I only thought you were disappointed with the abbot. Now I understand. But friend, do not go away; let us see what this abbot will be like. Please wait for a few days. 'Dogen had seen too many abbots

to be convinced. Yet, upon the repeated requests of his friend, he decided to pull on in the monastery for a few more days.

Ju-ching was the new abbot. He was somewhat different from the common run, it appeared. Dogen vacillated between hope and despair.

Everything got transfigured one blessed night. That night, Ju-ching was lecturing before the monks of the monastery about Zen. Dogen too listened. His inner conflict had heightened these days—so much so that he feared he had reached a break-point. What is Zen? While explaining this, Ju-ching said, '...it is dropping off both body and mind.' Suddenly something happened. It was as if a million suns shone all of a sudden. Instantly Dogen was enlightened. Years of struggle, sleepless nights, endless fasts and meditations bore fruit that instant. The whole thing changed in a moment.

Later, Dogen humbly entered the master's room. The tradition was to burn incense—an acknowledgement of the master's Buddhahood. The encounter is reported beautifully. 'What makes you burn incense?' asked the master. 'Both body and mind have dropped,' replied Dogen. The teacher seemed to accept it readily, as he repeated the same words. Dogen thought, why should his master accept him readily? He asked, 'What do you mean by dropping of body and mind?' Ju-ching replied, 'I mean that you really have dropped both body and mind [or, you have transcended the duality of matter and spirit].' 'Please do not set your seal on me so readily,' retorted Dogen. 'I am not setting my seal readily... You have indeed dropped both body and mind,' answered Ju-ching calmly. The test was over now. The disciple had finally reached the peak of his search. He bowed low before the teacher. The teacher smiled and said, 'Yes. That is dropping off the dropping too.' Who is this Dogen?

He is the founder of Soto branch of Zen. □

News and Reports

New Mission Centre

A branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission has been started at Indore under the name *Ramakrishna Mission, Indore*. The address of the centre is: Ramakrishna Mission, Ramakrishna Ashrama Marg, Kila Maidan, Indore, Madhya Pradesh 452006. (Phones: 0731-411621 & 414430.)

Ramakrishna Mission Relief and Rehabilitation Work

Andhra Pradesh Cyclone Rehabilitation

Arrangements are being made for pre-stressing the fourth concrete girder of the Vivekananda Bridge under construction at Pallavaripalem village in East Godavari district. Earthwork on the approaches and boulder-pitching on the slopes and apron is continuing in full swing. Also, a diversion of the existing asphalt road and shifting of the canal sluice are being done on war-footing so that the work may be completed before water is released into the canal at the onset of the monsoons.

Gujarat Cyclone Rehabilitation

The second colony consisting of 90 newly built houses, a temple-cum-community hall, a cultural-educational-medical centre, a children's park and five deep borewells at Nandana (now Vivekananda Nagar), constructed in collaboration with Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot, was declared open by Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 12 March.

A third project with 30 houses and similar infrastructure as mentioned above was inaugurated by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission on 19 March at Vadatra (now Sri Ma Sarada Nagar) in Jamnagar district.

Ramakrishna Mission, Porbandar, distributed 22,000 tiles under a 'Build Your Own House' scheme among 71 cyclone-affected families belonging to Kileshwar and three other villages of Jamnagar district. In addition, the centre has taken up a rehabilitation project to construct 20 houses, a community hall and other infrastructure at Vadala in Porbandar district. Acquisition of land and other preliminary arrangements are being made.

Maharashtra Earthquake Rehabilitation

After finishing work on three earthen embankments, repairing of 105 latrines and installation of 17 smokeless ovens, the Headquarters concluded the earthquake rehabilitation project in Latur on 1 April 1999, by winding up the 3½-year-long integrated rural development work named Vivekananda Gram Vikas Prakalpa. The ongoing activities were handed over to three different registered societies which have been formed in the three villages, viz Kawli, Javalgawadi and Haregaon. A revolving fund has been created for the maintenance of a skeleton staff and continuance of the various development activities. However, the project has been linked with the Vivekananda Research Training Institute, Mandvi, Loka Siksha Parishad, Narendrapur, and Ramakrishna Mission, Mumbai, for further guidance, technical assistance and overall supervision.

Uttar Pradesh Earthquake Relief

Steps were taken immediately after disaster struck to organize primary relief work among the worst affected villages of Chamoli and Rudraprayag districts. 36.3 quintals of rice, 33.3 quintals of flour, 1000 tarpaulin sheets, 1035 blankets and a large consignment of candles, lanterns and other essentials were distributed among 873 families belonging to Parkandi, Dharsal, Gair, Oring and 16 other villages in Ukimath and Chamoli of Garhwal region in the Himalayas.

West Bengal Flood Rehabilitation

After completing primary relief work covering 36 villages spread over eight blocks of Murshidabad district, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, has taken up a massive rehabilitation programme which will include repair of 360 severely damaged houses, 316 partially damaged ones, construction of 1100 latrines and installation of 31 hand-pumps. The programme was launched on 1 April.

That life is death which is for the self only, and death is verily eternal life when that happens to be for the good of many.

—Swami Vijnanananda